



VANLIFE IN FRANCE



Éditions the roadtrippers





VANLIFE IN FRANCE

Camille Visage
Pierre Rouxel

Éditions the roadtrippers

Thank you!

For this second self-edited book in the Roadtrip Makes Me Free collection, we would like to thank all the people who accompanied us, motivated us, and supported us during the writing and formatting process.

A big thank you to all the people who preordered our book, who trusted us enough to buy it even though it did not exist yet, and without whom this project would not have been achieved.

Thank you to you as well, who is currently holding this book in your hands. We hope that the result will meet your expectations and that it will inspire you to discover France a little more.

Then, a big thank you as well to our official sponsor, the camper van renting business Blacksheep, who supported us by financially helping with printing and by sharing their 3-day road trip in Vendée.

At last, we thank all of our other sponsors for their financial support and their help writing some Vanlife Tips of this book: *Fourgon Le Site*, *Idylcar*, *Van-Away*, *Eco campers* & *Wikicampers*



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Myriam & Florian from *Akao Van*
Pauline from *Yoga Vanlife*

Thank you all for kindly letting us interview you ♥



HERE. OR ELSEWHERE?



FRANCE. First touristic destination in the world, unbeatable for almost 40 years. But at the same time, so unknown.

As holidays are approaching, what is one of the first reflexes? Imagine ourselves elsewhere to escape what we know. Book a plane ticket and fly to a far away exotic destination, for example. This automatic response, we have had it for many years in search for an escape from everyday life, for wonderful landscapes, intercultural encounters, gastronomic specialties, or even unexplored roads reminiscent of the American Dream, certain that the grass is greener there.

We often felt the desire to discover the richness of our heritage with our own eyes. We rarely gave it the attention it deserved.

Until one day, this desire transformed into an amazing opportunity: five months of road trip, van life and discoveries, each one more exciting than the last.

Hop in, we are taking you with us to a destination that is both local and exotic. France.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Curious, with a passion for travel and intercultural encounters, we are first of all a couple of Bretons who love mountains and big natural spaces. We have been used to travel from country to country for a few years, first for our studies then for work, and the spirit of discovery is an integral part of our lives.

Our names are Camille and Pierre. We met at eighteen, during our first experience of volunteer work abroad, and we have not stopped exploring new horizons together since then. In 2017, after our road trip in Canada, we decided to create "The Roadtrippers", a collaborative platform dedicated to van life and road trips. It is both a webzine of van life inspiration and adventure stories, and we wanted the collection *Road trip Makes Me Free* to be in its image.

Business, web marketing, developing, photography, writing, designing, blogging, adventure and now publishing: we take advantage of each experience to acquire new skills. Whether we are on French roads or on a Thai island lost in the middle of the Indian Ocean, our office does not have roots: we are what our generation calls *digital nomads*.





AT THE START

OF THIS TRIP AROUND FRANCE

Presenting our first book in the biggest bookshops in France and take advantage of this opportunity to discover France, that is what inspired our second great journey in a converted van.

In 2017, while we were traveling across Canada, we fell in love with the van life. When we got back to France, as soon as we set foot on our native land, we already wanted to get back on the road. The road trip and the exhilarating freedom it gives were calling to us. In

spite of the many obstacles it made us face, we were already missing Bob, our 1985 Dodge Ram Van bought in Montreal then sold in Vancouver.

For a few months, we were distracted by the writing of this adventure and submerged into these happy memories - writing was our remedy. But once we printed *Roadtrip Makes Me Free* in Canada, the expected happened - our nomadic impulse woke up, stronger than ever.

The independent author, who does not work with a publishing company, takes

care of the design, the printing, and also the distribution of his book himself.

It was decided: we were going back on the road to tour the bookshops. We were going to buy a VW T3 Joker van and we would keep the copies in its roof extension.

To choose the departments where we would go, we took two factors into consideration when creating our itinerary: we wanted to travel through exotic places that resembled a far-away land, and we also wanted places with bookshops so


that we could bring our books there. We gave ourselves three months to close our loop. We ended up taking 2 extra months.

We had no idea of the deep questioning that this adventure would spark in us.





**7500
KM**
traveled in
5 months

126
NIGHTS
ABOARD
GEORGES

9 REGIONS
34
DEPARTEMENTS


103 BOOKS
DISTRIBUTED IN
17 BOOKSHOPS



6 square meters

for two

1 kayak
outing




3480€
SPENT

2 DAYS
OF WEEKLY
WORK

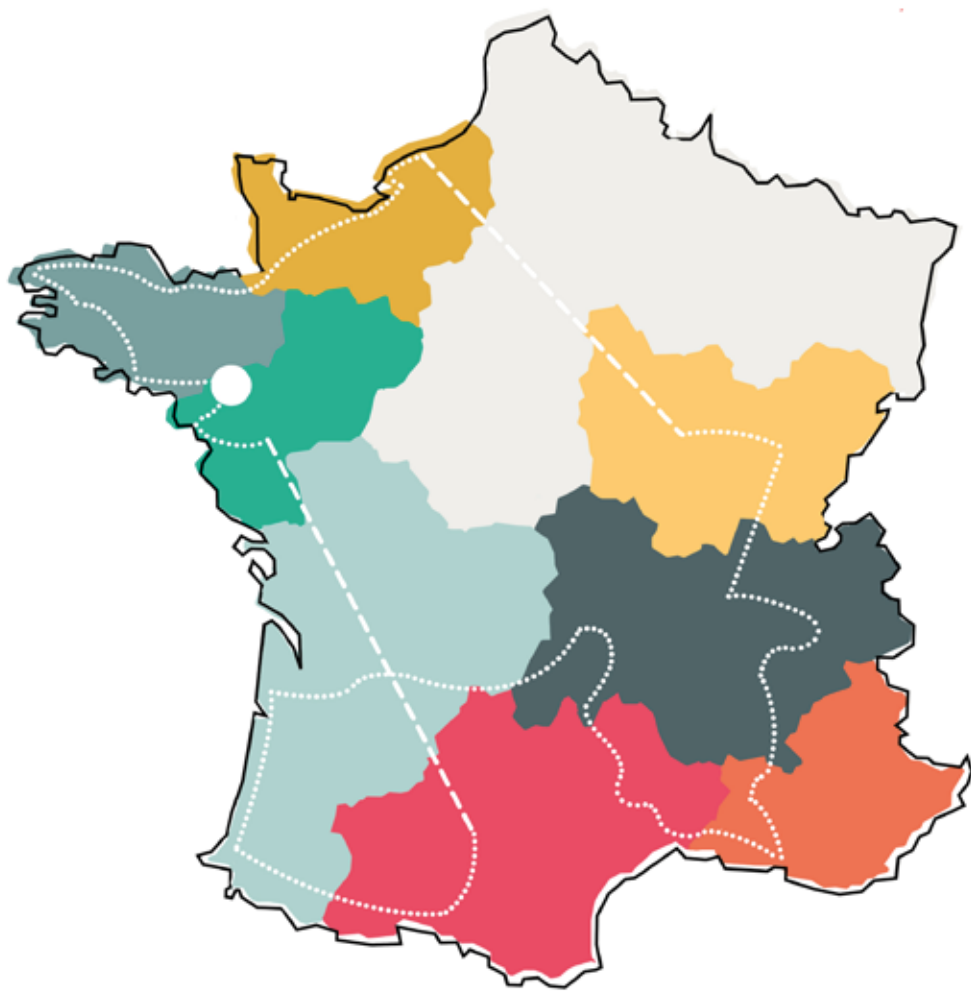

0
BREAKD
OWNS


800
BABY WIPES

23
HIKES

 **1**
shower a
week
34 600 L
of water
saved


OUR TOUR OF FRANCE IN 8 REGIONS



Pays de la Loire	p. 16
Occitany	p. 22 & 72
Nouvelle-Aquitaine	p. 30
Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes	p. 60 & 126
Provence-Côte-d'Azur	p. 100
Bourgogne-Franche-Comté	p. 134
Normandy	p. 142
Brittany	p. 160



Sleeping spot



Campsite



Nice hotel



Local specialty



Hike



Favorite moment



Zero Waste shop



Pays de la Loire

Departure from Jans

305 km



Between sea and swamp, Bouin: 47.0206, -1.99267



"Le Curé Nantais"



"Casa Vrac" : 14 Venelle de l'Escarpe, Clisson
(online store and in-store pick-up)

"O bocal" : 3 rue de l'Hôtel de Ville, Nantes



THE SPOIL HEAP OF ABBARETZ

A few kilometers away from Gruellau Pond, the ancient tin mine of Abbaretz is an unusual place that makes us feel like we are in moon-like landscapes. After the mining site closed, it was transformed into a recreational area. The old spoil heap with its 70m of height might be the hill that offers the best viewpoint in the department.



GRUELLAU POND

Because Camille's parents live in the area, we know a few well-kept treasures of the Loire-Atlantique that deserve to be seen. Gruellau Pond in Treffieux is one of these green gems (of 65 hectares nonetheless) with ponds, woods, and fields. It is the ideal setting for an open-air walk or picnic between two destinations.



PORNICHET

Holiday destination and seaside resort of the Loire-Atlantique between Saint-Brévin and La Baule, Pornichet seduced us with its beautiful 1990 villas. On Saturday morning, the main square transforms itself to welcome merchants and gluttons for a few hours. On our way to "Plage des Libraires", the Ker Souveraine villa catches the eye. Built in 1925 in an Italian neoclassical style, it is often referred to as Pornichet's star villa.

ALONG THE CHÂTEAUX OF THE LOIRE VALLEY

— 143 km —

The Châteaux of the Loire Valley are one of the must-see attractions for foreign tourists in France. But do we know our regional treasures ourselves? If you never visited the Loire Valley's castles before, write down the itinerary that we prepared between Tours and Blois. Alongside the Loire, discover six architectural gems of French History.

The Château of Chambord

Chambord is probably the most well-known and the biggest of the Loire Valley's castles. Take the unmissable double spiral staircase, designed by the ingenious Leonardo da Vinci. This architectural prowess could make the reputation of this castle on its own.

The Château of Cheverny

Do you remember the famous Marlinspike Hall in *The Adventures of Tintin*? Well, Cheverny is the castle that inspired Hergé for his work. Still inhabited, it is said to be one of the most beautifully furnished of the Val de Loire.

The Châteaux of Chenonceau and Clos-Lucé

Chenonceau, also known as "le château des Dames" (The Ladies' Castle), is certainly the most charming of the Loire Valley. A fantasy atmosphere oozes from its architecture and the arches that straddle the Cher River.

The Clos-Lucé, more intimate, was one of the summer residences of the Kings of France and the last residence of Leonardo da Vinci.

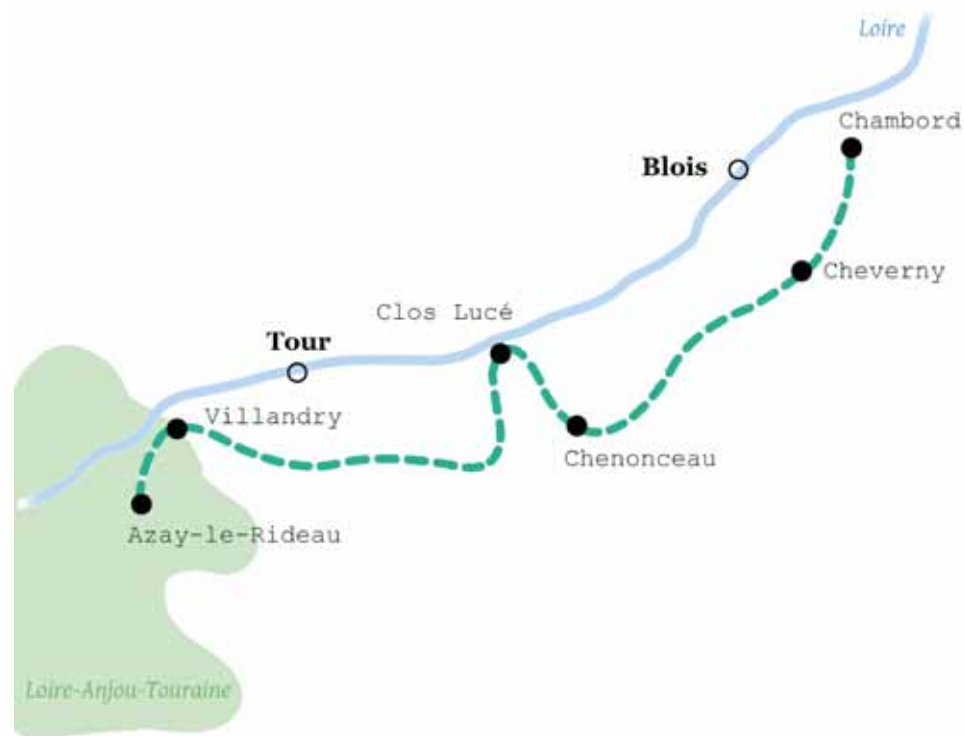
The Châteaux of Villandry and the Château of Azay-le-Rideau

This last step brings us a few kilometers south of Tours, at the entrance of the Loire-Anjou-Touraine natural park, to discover two final castles. The Château of Villandry, known for its gardens, and Azay-le-Rideau which, circled by the waters of the Indre River, shows its magnificent reflection.

A nice sleeping spot is awaiting you a stone's throw away from the Château of Chenonceau:

47.3226770, 1.0636662

Between two destinations, do not hesitate to stop in a troglodyte village or in a mushroom farm, characteristic of the region.





The Pyrenees

From Toulouse to Lourdes

405 km



Roumé Chapel, Cieutat: 43.111802, 0.210622



"Refuge des Oulettes" in Gaube



"Le gâteau à la broche" (Cake on a rod)



Lake Gaube

SAINT-GIRONS MARKET

We could not travel through the Ariège department without making a stop in Saint-Girons on market day. It takes place all year on Saturdays from 8am till 1pm in the center of the village. There you can find small farmers who promote rural and eco-friendly agriculture, biological products from mountain farms, local charcuterie, and baked goods. This market is a real treasure trove for those interested in alternative ways of consumption. All of that in a friendly environment, surrounded by the sound of improvised concerts.



ROUMÉ CHAPEL

In Geutat, the Notre-Dame-de-Roumé chapel, dating back to the end of the seventeenth century, is one of the oldest ever built on the route to Santiago de Compostela. Four times a year, this place becomes a stop of the pilgrimage again. We spent one night near the building on a parking lot surrounded by fields, with a view on the Pyrenees. When the weather is clear, you can even see the top of the Pic du Midi.



LOURDES

Even though we are not churchgoers, we wanted to make a stop in Lourdes before discovering the Pyrenees. Ever since we were children, we have heard about Lourdes and its miracles. It is true that in the Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Sanctuary, there is a very special atmosphere, favorable for recollection and for the awakening of the sacred within us.



GAVARNIE CIRQUE

This natural, semi-circular enclosure with steep walls is one of the biggest in France. How could one not be subjugated by this vertiginous wall from which flows out one of the highest waterfalls in Europe, with its 413 meters of free fall. Today, this sensational site is accessible in just 30 minutes. It takes an extra hour to get to the bottom of the big waterfall. Gavarnie Cirque, true spectacle of nature's forces, is a place that amazes as much as it impresses.



LAKE GAUBE



Trail		GR 10
Time		3 h
Slope		450 m

It has only been a few days since we took off and we can not wait to do our first hike in the heart of the Pyrenees. We park Georges in Cauterets and take the shuttle to the Pont d’Espagne, in order to avoid some difficult turns. In a few minutes, the cable car teleports us 1700 meters high.

The lake reveals itself in front of our eyes. At this time of year, we are not the only ones who have chosen this place for an outdoor excursion in the Pyrenees, but it does not matter: the setting is idyllic.

If we continue to go up to the spring deep in the valley, we should reach the Refuge des Oulettes in two hours. Partly hidden by a series of clouds, we are trying to keep Mount Vignemale in sight. Prostrate on its unreachable promontory, an izard watches us from the corner of its eye. Another one, younger and busy grazing grass, ignores us completely.

After a two-hour walk, we reach the Refuge des Oulettes, outsider among these untamed elements. There, we find a dormitory and a big common room where we will enjoy a comforting dinner, accompanied by the other hikers. The atmosphere is friendly in this shelter

separated from the rest of the world.

While our temporary roommates still sleep soundly, I sneak out of the dormitory. Outside, the weather is also quiet. There is not a sound to be heard. I sit on a high rock to contemplate this spectacle that is both peaceful and amazing. The first sun rays progressively reach the mountaintop. Nothing can disturb this suspended moment. Cut off from any phone network and internet connection, close to a wild nature that is impressive and preserved, we feel like we are living privileged moments. We feel both vulnerable and trivial compared to the exterior elements, but also immensely nourished from within by those extraordinary moments.





The Basque Country

From Rébénacq to Bayonne

179 km



Itxassou Aerodrome: 43.335999, 1.42077



"Carrique" Farm campsite, route d'Alcay, Alos-Sibas-Abense



"Le gâteau basque à la confiture de cerises noires"
(Cake with dark cherry jam)

SAINT-JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT

Located at the confluence of the Laurhibar and the Nive Rivers, the village is overlooked by a huge citadel from the seventeenth century. With its pedestrian streets full of irregular pavement, its inns for the pilgrims of Santiago de Compostela, and its walkway offering a panoramic view of the surrounding hills, the little town is full of Basque History and culture. Go a few hundred years back in time while you walk through the historic center.



ESPELETTE

Famous for its pepper cultivation, Espelette brings joy to photography and spicy food enthusiasts. With their red wooden shutters and the dried peppers stung together on their white façades, the houses of this picturesque village provide a usual and exotic vision compared to what we are used to seeing in the rest of the country. Each year on the last weekend of October, festivities take place in the village to celebrate the Espelette pepper holiday.



SAINT-JEAN-DE-LUZ

On the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, right in Socoa Bay, between seaside resort and authentic historic village, the old center of Saint-Jean-de-Luz is a must-see on the Basque country. Even though it is very touristy, its eventful history is engraved in the stones of its old narrow alleys. A walk on the other side of the Nivelle River, in Ciboure, is also recommended.



BIARRITZ

Quintessential seaside resort since the nineteenth century, the economic activity of Biarritz has done nothing but grow since then. The rich architecture and the big roads of this touristic hotspot bear witness to this growth. Though we found the center to be somewhat overrated, the charm of the old harbor convinced us. The beach, the Rocher de la Vierge and the Rocher du Basta are must-see spots. Upon leaving, make a detour to the Biarritz lighthouse, the place is worth seeing.





The Landes

From Bayonne to Biscarrosse

150 km



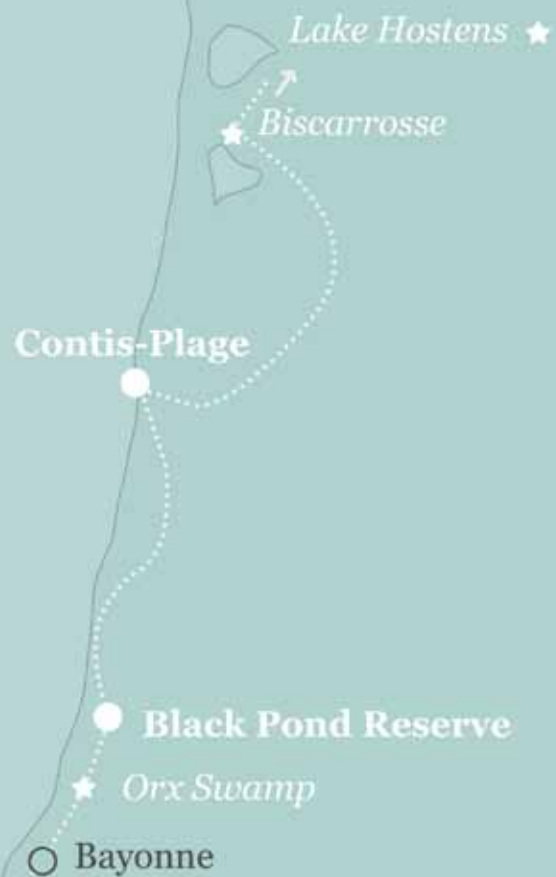
Slow Village, Biscarrosse



"Camping Lous Seurrots", Saint-Julien-en-Born



"Le pastis landais"



THE BLACK POND NATURAL RESERVE

From Seignosse to the beaches that border the ocean, the Back Pond Natural Reserve is a beauty. The edges of the pond are equipped with platforms, thanks to which you can walk through the vegetation. Many sand trails also allow to go further into the reserve on both sides of road D89 or road D337. Regarding the beaches, the current and the powerful waves can make swimming dangerous.



CONTIS-PLAGE

This seaside resort, which you can find on maps under the name of Contis-Bains, is a surfer's or kite surfer's paradise. Surfing equipment shops to buy or rent surfboard, restaurants, and camping sites in the area: we spent a few days there to try out this nautical activity with some friends that we met there. The ocean, pine trees, sand, beautiful waves, and a lack of rocks: this place has an undeniable charm.





Arcachon Bay

From the Dune of Pilat to Lège-Cap-Ferret

133 km



A few steps from the beach, Lège-Cap-Ferret: 44.7985, -1.22165



"Camping aux couleurs du Ferret", Lège-Cap-Ferret



"L'huître du bassin d'Arcachon" (Arcachon Bay oyster)



PIRAILLAN

Arcachon Bay coast is home to many oyster farming villages: Teste de Buch, Andernos, Arès, le Canon, l'Herbe, etc. With Piraillan, it was love at first sight. Less frequented than its peers, this village's group of colored wooden cabins, a few of few are stilt houses, is a true gem of Cape Ferret. Many oyster tastings will be offered to you as you walk around.



GRAND COHOT BEACH

Not only is the beach superb, but you can also enjoy it by staying two nights (max.) on one of the free parking spaces under the pine trees. The spaces are not delimited, and the place looks more like a forest than a parking lot. As well as being popular among surfers, this long coastal strand of white sand is ideal for a spontaneous swim. The only negative thing: there is no public shower there. We stayed for one night, after having a pre-dinner drink on the beach.



THE DUNE OF PILAT

The impressive Dune of Pilat, the highest in Europe, is one of the must-see spots in Arcachon Bay, which will be memorable. We were doubtful at first and had to go on location to realize how exceptional this formation was. Here, three colors dominate: the luxurious green of the forest, the pale beige of the sand, and the deep blue of the ocean. Once you are on top of this huge dune, the change of scenery is complete. This place being one of the most touristic natural places in France, we advise you to go during the week, off-season, and early in the morning.



The Wine Route

From Bordeaux to Monbazillac

105 km



Le Port, G nissac : 44.8736, -0.244928



"Domaine de Cavaroque" Farm campsite, Monbazillac



"Vin blanc liquoreux Monbazillac" (Monbazillac sweet white wine)



Sleeping in a winemaker's garden



SAINT-ÉMILION

Ancient medieval town in the middle of the Libourne country, Saint-Émilion is a must-see for vintage wine lovers. The village is part of the UNESCO World Heritage of Humanity, and is, as UNESCO says: "the remarkable example of an historic vineyard landscape that is intact". The main square is a wonder of architecture and history. A walk to the tower of the Château of Roy will give you a breathtaking view of the town's other roofs.



MONBAZILLAC

Globally known for its vineyards to which it gave its name, Monbazillac is a charming village and a necessary stop on the wine route. Before spending the night at a winemaker's to taste his 2018 batch, we made a detour to the Château of Monbazillac, which is now a museum.



MONBAZILLAC

Camille's
FAVORITE MOMENT



We are slowly reaching the lands of Dordogne while we drive to Monbazillac, south of Bergerac. We only traveled about sixty kilometers from Saint-Émilion, but the sweltering heat of the end of July pushes us to stop for a few hours under the trees, on the wide parking lot of the Château Monbazillac.

The site, which became a museum and is visited by tourists from all nationalities, is conducive to reflection. How do we prefer to discover this particularly rich terroir? Through a museum or by meeting its inhabitants?

We decide to enjoy our stay in this viticultural area of the Périgord Pourpre, to spend the night in a vineyard. We find happiness in the Cavaroque estate, member of the "Bienvenue à la ferme" network (farm campsite).

The owner, independent winemaker, welcomes us warmly by offering us a guided tour of their wine cellar, followed by a tasting of their AOC Monbazillac of 2014 and 2016. After a very interesting

conversation, we buy a fresh bottle that we will open for dinner.

Parked at the back of the estate, surrounded by sixteen hectares of vines and fruit trees, we will be the only ones to enjoy this haven of peace for the night.

I loved this first camping experience on a farm. This brings a more human side to our road trip, while it educates us on the work and the daily life of small French farmers.





Through Dordogne

From Issigeac to Carennac

105 km



Lake Tolerne, Sénaillac-Latronquière : 44.8237, 2.05514



"Castelwood", Biron

"Les Esclargies", Rocamadour



"Port d'Enveaux" Farm campsite, Saint-Vincent-de-Cosse



"La truffe du Périgord"



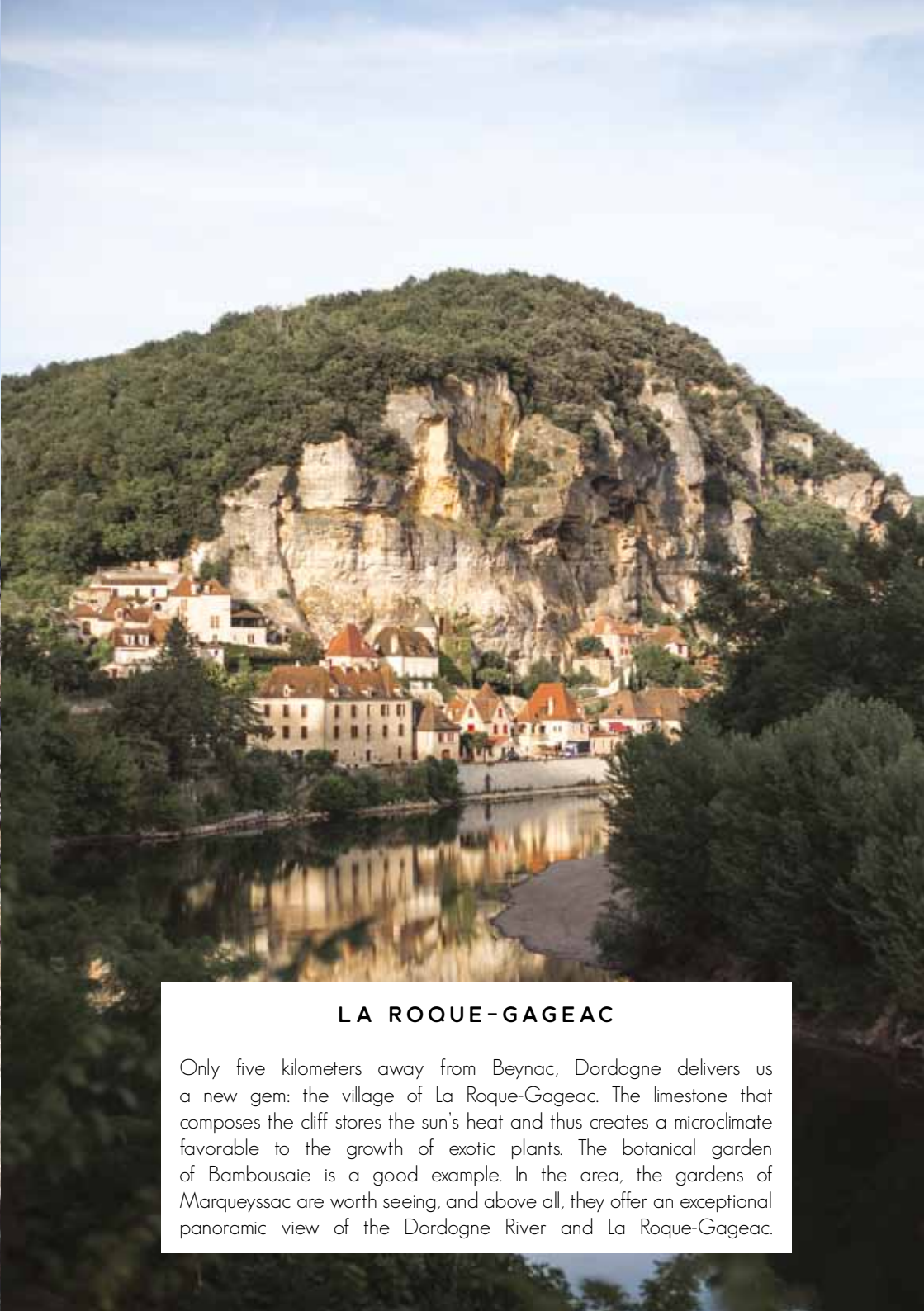
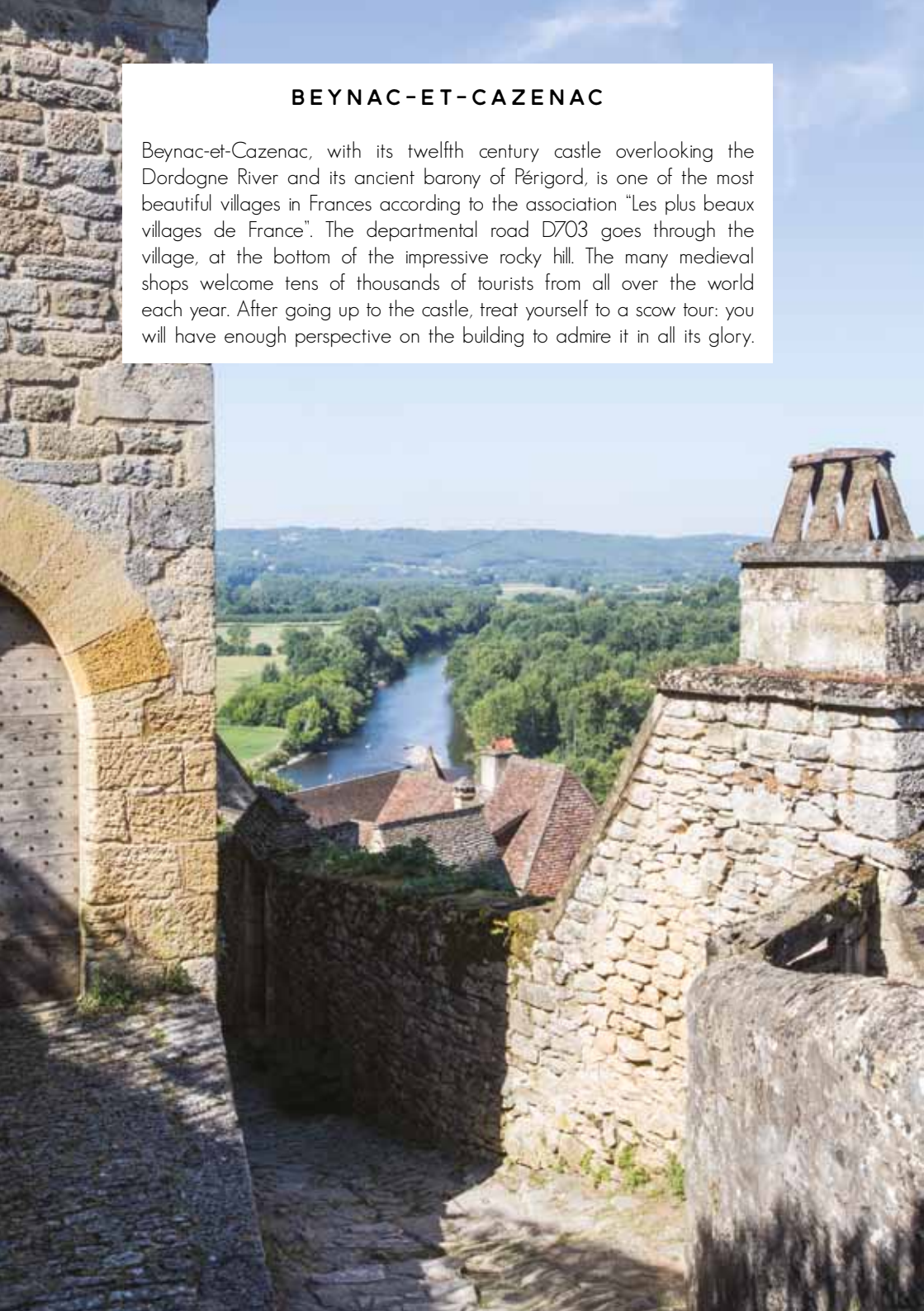
Discovering Rocamadour at dawn

N
▲

25 km

BEYNAC-ET-CAZENAC

Beynac-et-Cazenac, with its twelfth century castle overlooking the Dordogne River and its ancient barony of Périgord, is one of the most beautiful villages in France according to the association "Les plus beaux villages de France". The departmental road D703 goes through the village, at the bottom of the impressive rocky hill. The many medieval shops welcome tens of thousands of tourists from all over the world each year. After going up to the castle, treat yourself to a scow tour: you will have enough perspective on the building to admire it in all its glory.



LA ROQUE-GAGEAC

Only five kilometers away from Beynac, Dordogne delivers us a new gem: the village of La Roque-Gageac. The limestone that composes the cliff stores the sun's heat and thus creates a microclimate favorable to the growth of exotic plants. The botanical garden of Bambousaie is a good example. In the area, the gardens of Marqueyssac are worth seeing, and above all, they offer an exceptional panoramic view of the Dordogne River and La Roque-Gageac.



ROCAMADOUR

Pierre's
FAVORITE MOMENT



We wake up at the crack of dawn. It's 6 in the morning. The sun rays are breaking in the passenger compartment of our vehicle. Georges is happy about it : he can not wait to go back on the road and to make his motor roar again.

Excited at the idea of starting this new day which seems full of good surprises, I jump out of bed and quickly get dressed before getting out of the van. There is no cloud in sight: the day seems perfect for an early start. I immediately wake Camille up.

The road kept its promises. The Dordogne River and the fields that we drive through are covered in a thin layer of pale and translucent mist. The horizon looks blurry, as if the landscape itself had a hard time waking up. After a good hour of driving, we drive along the south side of Rocamadour on the departmental road D32. The view is stunning and offers a clear panorama of the old medieval town, hanging on the cliff and bathing in the soft sunlight.

Usually taken by storm by loads of tourists, and to our delight, the village just woke up. On its main street, only a few merchants are moving around and opening their shops.

We take an express breakfast, made of baked goods and tea, sitting under the sun. The swallows go in and out of their improvised birdhouses in the walls of the sanctuary, engaging in a both strange and elegant ballet. Their shadows cast on the rock's surface by the already high sun seem to give life to the fortification.

It is hot. The 216 white limestone steps of the Grand Escalier, trapping thousands of fossilized belemnites, are already warm. The smell of graphite accompanies the climb. At the top, practically the only ones to stomp the pavement of the sanctuary, we continue to immerge ourselves into the mystical atmosphere that emerges from this historic hotspot. In the direction of the Chemin de Croix, and in the shade of its trees, the religious hymns of the monks echo in the Dordogne Valley.

SURF TRIP BETWEEN VENDÉE & CHARENTE-MARITIME

— 137 km —

Brittany and the Landes are not the only ones to attract wave-loving amateur surfers. From Vendée to Charente-Maritime, we also find nice spots for the more or less experienced riders. We listed five must-go spots for a road trip in which van life rhymes with surf.

La Sauzaie

This Vendée spot, at the doors of Brétignolles-sur-Mer is well known among experienced surfers. You can surf there from September to May!

Les Sables-d'Olonne

At high tide (preferably), head towards Tanchet Beach at the south of the Sables-d'Olonne Bay for this first spot which was home to one step of the French Surf Cup in 2018.

Jard-sur-Mer

Mine Beach, surrounded by dunes, reveals beautiful waves at low tide: ideal for beginner and intermediate surfers.

Longeville-sur-Mer

The Bud Bud spot also makes Vendée's surf reputation, we even say that it has nothing to envy to the Landes beach breaks. The Bud Bud Contest takes

place there each year, which will celebrate its 21st edition in 2020.

Sainte-Marie-de-Ré

We now arrive in the department of Charente-Maritime to make a stop on the beautiful Ré Island. An ideal spot for beginners? Grenettes Beach with its soft and low waves.

After a morning in the water, why not take a bike and discover the island's typical small villages? Like Ars-en-Ré for example, with its photogenic bell tower. You can also spend the afternoon in Saint-Martin-de-Ré, wandering from shop to shop, an ice cone from the Martinière in hand. Before going back on the continent, do not forget to climb on top of the Phare des Baleines (257 steps for the bravest among you!)



3 DAYS ON THE WEST COAST WITH BLACKSHEEP VAN

Léa and Matthieu tell us about their iodized escapade from Vendée to the Gironde estuary in a Blacksheep campervan. A perfect itinerary idea for a departure from a renting agency in Nantes, Bordeaux or even Toulouse.



Founded in 2011 by Edouard and Sylvain, two long-time friends with a passion for outdoor and mountain sports, Blacksheep has only one deep desire: offer unusual on-the-road vacations to be closer to nature and in complete autonomy. With 25 agencies in France, Blacksheep is today

a major actor in campervan renting. By offering a diverse collection of vehicles for every budget, Blacksheep wants to offer the majority of people a chance to enjoy adventure and, above all, freedom! Check them out at www.blacksheep-van.com.

DAY 1

We start the weekend by a trip to Port of Minimes in La Rochelle. Then, we head to Ré Island: a place between vines and ocean, which allows us to enjoy a preserved nature. In this exceptional setting away from light pollution, we fall asleep after having counted millions of stars!

DAY 2

We continue to drive along the coast until we reach Saint-Palais-sur-Mer, where we take the "Sentier des Douaniers" trail and walk along the shore to breathe the marine air of the Atlantic Ocean! We take a swimming break on the beach, before going to our night spot: in front of the majestic Gironde estuary, where the sun is setting on the "carrelets", those fishing cabins that are typical in the area.

DAY 3

For this last day of adventure, we head towards Blaye, where we load the van on a boat to cross the river, which is starting to look like a bayou in Mississippi! Once we get across, we drive with all windows open to reach Lacanau Océan for a last dive in the waves of the Atlantic Ocean. We wake up to the sound of the waves, with a view on the surfers waiting for the first waves of the day.

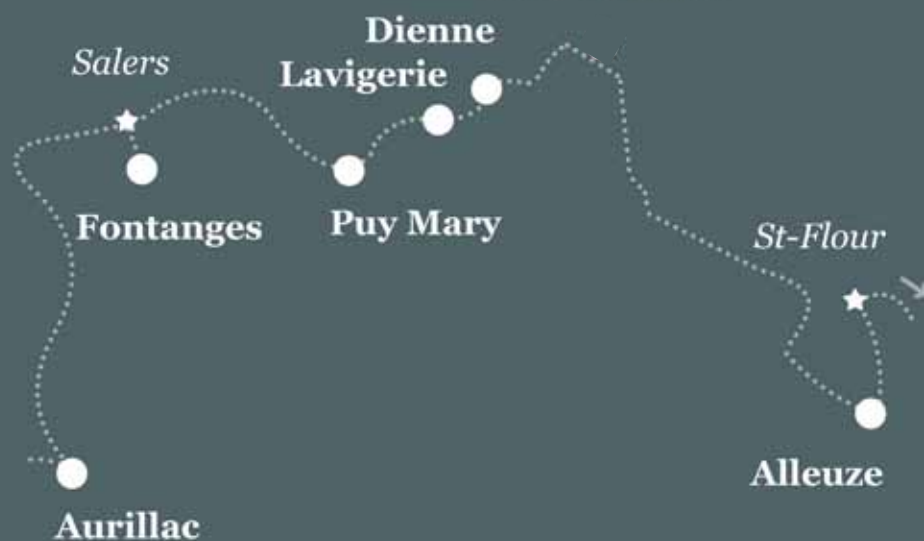




Cantal

From Aurillac to Saint-Flour

166 km



"Lake Génévrières", Crandelles : 44.9589, 2.34159

"Lavigerie", Puy Mary : 45.1301, 2.70264



"Camping de la Pierre Plate", in Fontanges



"Le fromage Cantal" (Cantal cheese)



A moment of absoluteness



The GR400 trail at Puy Mary

FONTANGES

The village of Fontanges is home to a monolith chapel dug in a rock formation. Small stairs lead to the top of the rock, decorated with a statue of Virgin Mary opening her arms in the direction of the peaks. Very quiet and unexpensive the municipal camping of Pierre Plate was our crashing point for a whole week.



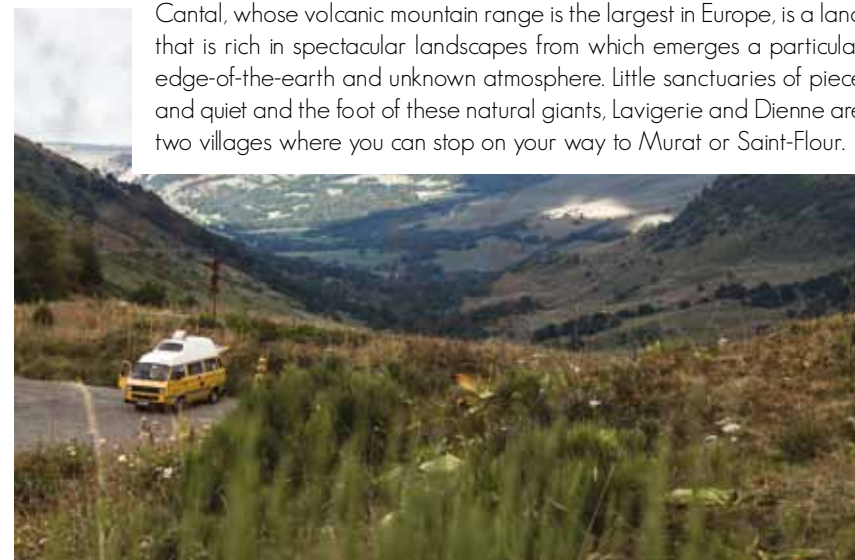
PUY MARY

The panoramic road D680 that links Salers to Puy Mary offer a clear point of view on the mounts of Cantal. But we will always remember this stressful climb of Puy Mary, which made Georges' motor overheat. At the top, the view is breathtaking. A cabin-restaurant is set up there since 1967 to enjoy the air and the beauty of the mountain.



LAVIGERIE & DIENNE

Cantal, whose volcanic mountain range is the largest in Europe, is a land that is rich in spectacular landscapes from which emerges a particular edge-of-the-earth and unknown atmosphere. Little sanctuaries of peace and quiet and the foot of these natural giants, Lavigerie and Dienne are two villages where you can stop on your way to Murat or Saint-Flour.



GORGES OF TRUYÈRE

The Gorges of Truyère, in-between Cantal and Lozère, dig the horizon line. We discover the site, starting from the village of Neufchâtel. The road ends on a wonderful bivouac spot with a view on the gorges. You will see a path that goes down to a swimming area. The shores are only inhabited by a thick forest of dark green pines whose shapes are reflected in the quiet surface of the water.



PUY MARY



Trail		GR 400
Time		3 h
Slope		400 m

We have been in Cantal for a week now. The sun is barely rising over the horizon, and we are already turning on the ignition, impatient to reach Puy Mary, which is the highest peak in Cantal.

As we are driving on the departmental road D680 and as the slope continues to rise, we are starting to have doubts: will Georges be able to reach the parking lot where the trail starts? As the seconds pass, our eyes compulsively check the motor temperature and oil level indicators. Ten minutes later, we finally reach Puy Mary. Georges was sweating bullets and we were too...

Luckily, the panoramic view that awaits us at the finish point on the Peyrol Pass exceeds our expectations. The pyramid-shaped silhouette of Puy Mary is instantly recognizable.

Steep stairs bordered with wildflowers are leading the way to the orientation table at the top of the mountain. We are 1783 meters above sea level, surrounded by Puy Girou and Plomb du Cantal.

The hike follows the GR400 trail on the ridges of the Grand Volcan. The narrow rocky path that sneaks between the mountains offers us a breathtaking view. I try to pay attention to each one of my steps, especially at the difficult pathway of Roland Breach, but the desire to only contemplate those landscapes, sometimes touched by the rays that are stealthily piercing the clouds, is too strong. We continue on to the Crête des Fours Pass, before going back down through the Impradine, the path that follows the rocky walls leading us back to Peyrol Pass.

There are no words to explain how good walking on those ridges makes us feel. This raw land, this mother force gives me new energy. It is like an essential ritual that allows me to deeply recharge my batteries.



A MOMENT OF ABSOLUTENESS

Camille's

FAVORITE MOMENT



We might have never discovered this little wild treasure, nestled between the Cézailler Plateau and the mounts of Cantal, if Laurence had not contacted me after our hike on the ridges of Puy Mary. We happily accept this spontaneous invitation to discover the “Instants d’Absolu” eco-lodge.

After the hamlet of La Boissonnière, we take the little junction that goes to the lake. We hope to not come across anyone because the path is not big enough for two vehicles. As we go deeper in the Pinatelle Woods, it starts to feel like we are headed to a secret location, lost in the heart of the wild nature. All of a sudden, after turning the last corner, this panoramic view that I will remember for a long time reveals itself in front of our eyes. We take a break to enjoy this moment lost in time. My throat closes and my heart starts pounding, I fall in love with this place.

Laurence and Daniel warmly welcome us inside their eco-lodge while they tell us about the history of the site and its rehabilitation. From the terrace of the eco-lodge, we can see ducks, herons, crested grebes, right on the lake that

was nothing but a deserted, dry, hostile land nine years earlier. The eco-lodge project has evolved with the nature that surrounds it and has breathed new life into this wild fauna that, now preserved, can take back its rights.

Warning: wild camping and van camping are prohibited in this protected and extremely fragile natural area. Forest fires are a real threat for this sensitive natural area, so campfires and barbecues are not allowed around Lake Pêcher.

Whether it is for a walk in nature, a nature break by the lake as well as a massage, a unique night or dinner at the eco-lodge: a trip to Lake Pêcher is a true experience. For me, it will remain the most magical experience in our tour of France.



THE CHEESE ROUTE AND AUVERGNE'S VOLCANOS — 436 km —

If you like good cheese and the mystery behind volcanos, you are at the right place! Here is an itinerary suggestion that mixes steps from the AOP Auvergne cheese route and steps from the Puys range.

From Volvic to Puy de Sancy

The Auvergne cheese route does not have a defined starting or finishing point. However, we suggest you wander the streets of Puy-du-Dôme between Volvic and Besse-et-Saint-Anastaise. On the way, you will enjoy a beautiful preview of the Puys range.

You can start the route from Volvic, then follow the small roads between Orcines and Orcival until you reach Mont-Dore. Go around Puy de Sancy through Chastreix, then go back up towards Saint-Nectaire via Besse.

Our favorite nature spots closest to the volcanos

The Puys range is a series of 80 volcanos with seven main domes, over a distance of 35km.

Le puy de Pariou

Puy de Pariou is one of the most iconic one of the range. Maybe because it is the symbol on the bottles of Volvic water. It is one of the only volcanos where you can walk up to the center of the crater.

Le puy de la Vache

Puy de la Vache is part of one of the most recent volcanic complexes in the Puys range. With a small, marked hike, you can reach in a few minutes a panoramic view of the entire south of the department, where you can even see the summit of Puy de Sancy.

Le puy de Sancy

Puy de Sancy is the highest summit of the Massif Central. You can even walk a loop around the ridges in one day. An opportunity to discover the big waterfall of Mont-Dore, Peak Capucin or even climb to the orientation table 1886 meters high.

Saint-Nectaire farmers worth visiting:

"La ferme Randanne"
in Aurières

"La ferme le Roc"
in Orcival

"La ferme La Clef des Champs"
in Besse-et-Saint-Anastaise

"La ferme des Lambres"
in Saint-Nectaire





The Aubrac Plateau

From Malbouzon to Aubrac

90 km



Lac des Moines, Aubrac : 44.618935, 3.014534



"La Colonie", Aubrac



"L'Aligot"

MARCHASTEL HILL

Have you ever set foot in the Aubrac Plateau? The Aubrac Plateau is actually on the grounds of three departments: Aveyron, Cantal and Lozère. Since the beginning of our road trip, we can not wait to arrive on these basalt lands where high plateaus with bare meadows stretch to the horizon. Marchastel Hill is a clear spot that overlooks this characteristic landscape shaped by a pastoral tradition.



NASBINALS

Nasbinals, with its granite and basalt houses, is considered the capital of the plateau. Discover the tea shop of the Aubrac Plateau in the center of the village, as well as the photo exhibition Phot'Abrac which displays each year amateur or professional photographers, who love the region. As you go out of the village, turn right after the bridge to take the small road in the middle of the fields, which links Marchastel to Malbouzan.



AUBRAC

On the road to Santiago de Compostela, Aubrac had for a long time been a stop for the pilgrims. Today, we can stop at the botanical garden in front of *La Maison de l'Aubrac*. It is home to more than 650 wild species from the Aubrac range. If you are around on May 25th, do not miss the summer transhumance day where you will meet the most beautiful cows of Aubrac breed.



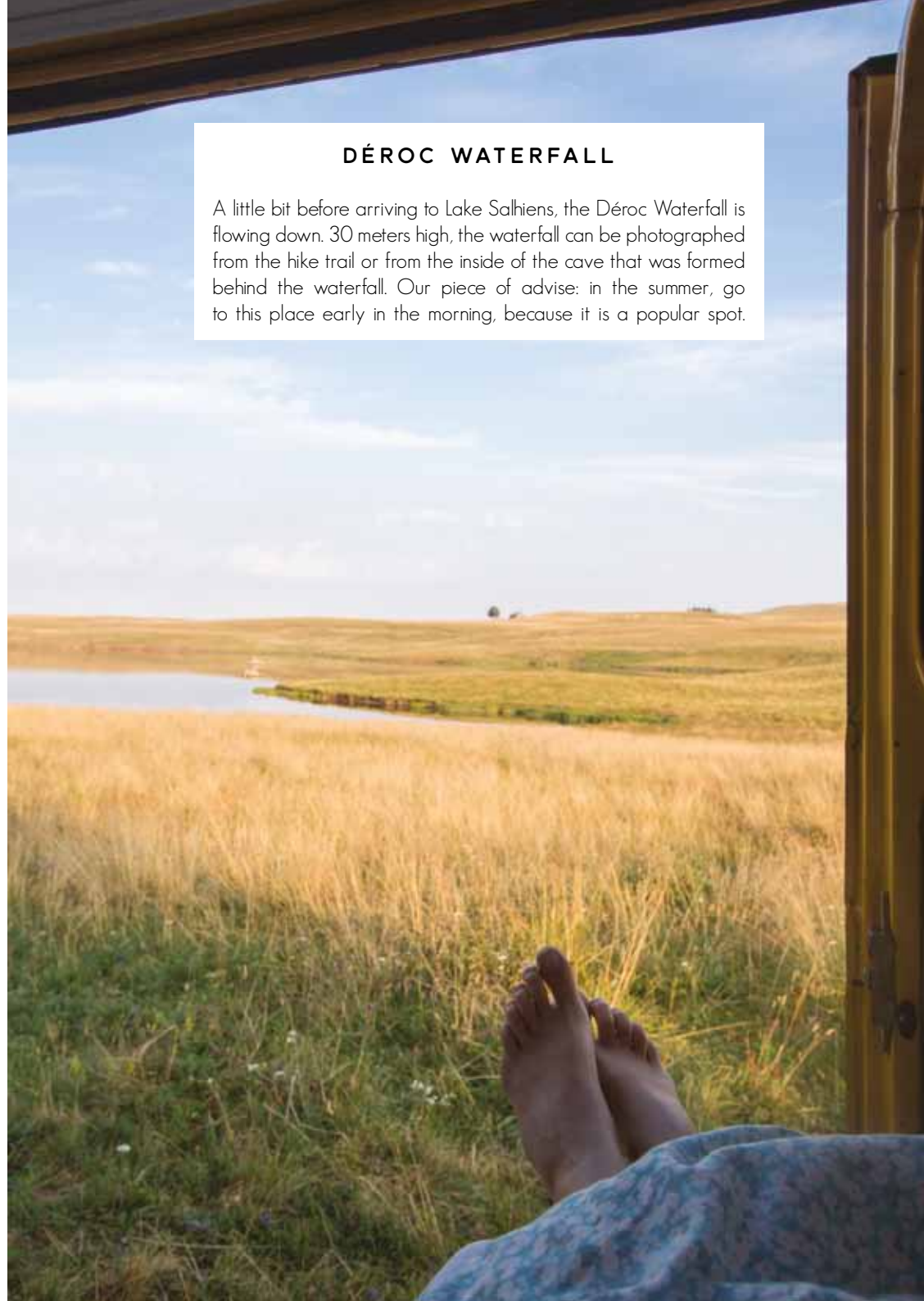
LAC DES MOINES

A few kilometers away from Nasbinals, right before reaching Aubrac, the quiet waters of Lac des Moines are sleeping. A stone "buron" (typical mountain cabin) and a lonely tree complete this minimalist picture wonderfully. We spent one night there, lulled to sleep by the characteristic changing lights of the Aubrac Plateau.



DÉROC WATERFALL

A little bit before arriving to Lake Salhiens, the Déroc Waterfall is flowing down. 30 meters high, the waterfall can be photographed from the hike trail or from the inside of the cave that was formed behind the waterfall. Our piece of advise: in the summer, go to this place early in the morning, because it is a popular spot.





The Gorges of Tarn

From Mende to Rosier

118 km



"Nivoliers", Causse Méjean : 44.255299, 3.45644



"Camping municipal Aux Portes du Sauveterre", St-Rome-de-Dolan



"Le miel des Cévennes" (Cévennes honey)



"Tour du Causse Méjean" hike trail (red and yellow markings)



SAINT-ROME-DE-DOLAN

Dominating the gorges, Saint-Rome-de-Dolan is the ideal base camp to admire the vultures that circle around in the sky and go at nightfall in various caves of these limestone giants. We spent a few nights in the municipal camping of the village at the edge of the cliffs, with a view of the high plateaus of the Causse Méjean that stretch to the horizon.



THE POINT SUBLIME BELVEDERE

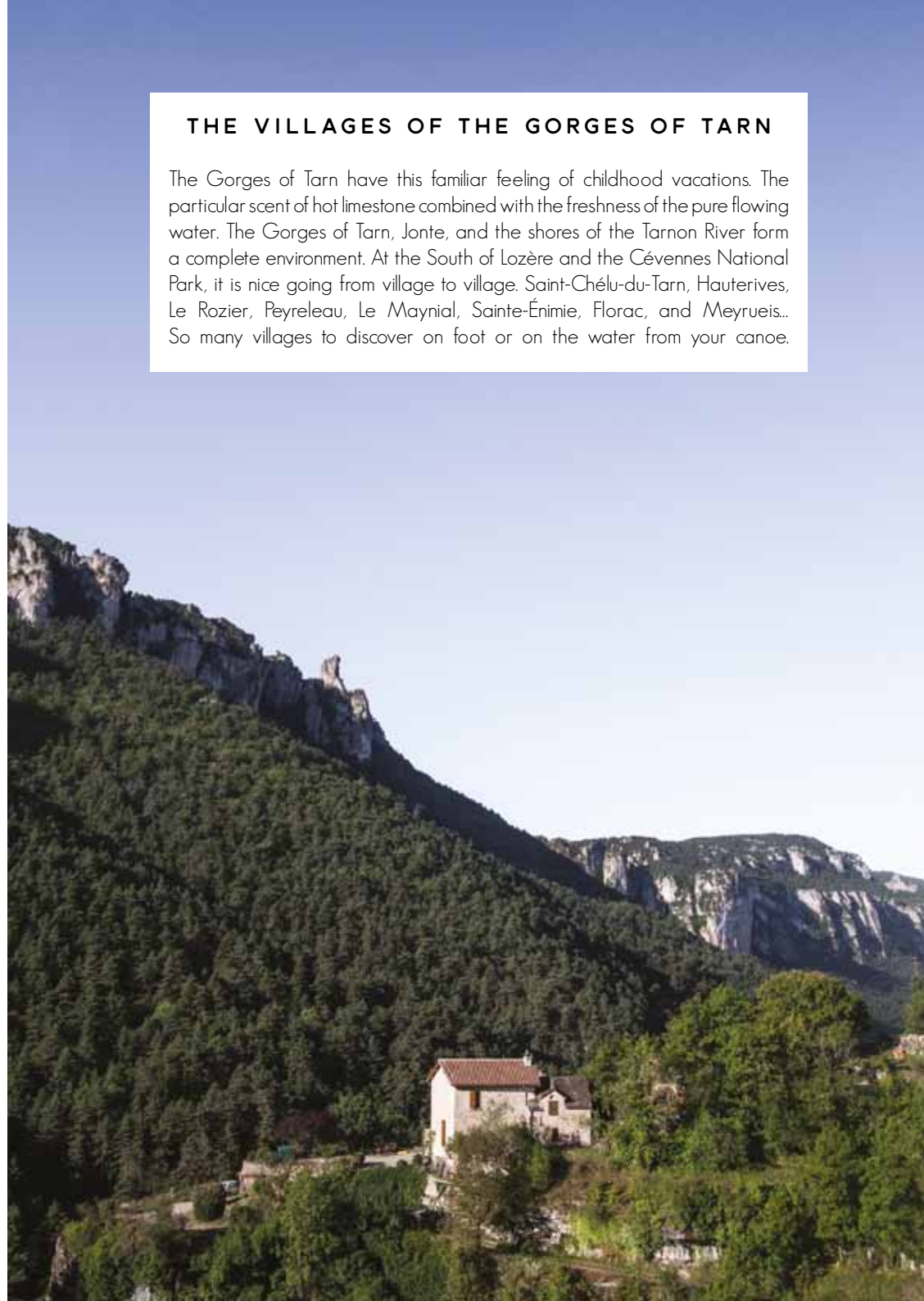
Some people say that it is the most beautiful spot in the Gorges of Tarn. The best viewpoint to contemplate the picture painted by the water for millions of years, shaping the landscape into caves and underground resurgences. The gorges reach 500 meters high. The spectacle is dizzying: from left to right, you can follow with your eyes the tortuous flow of the waters that wind between the enormous rocky walls.





THE VILLAGES OF THE GORGES OF TARN

The Gorges of Tarn have this familiar feeling of childhood vacations. The particular scent of hot limestone combined with the freshness of the pure flowing water. The Gorges of Tarn, Jonte, and the shores of the Tarnon River form a complete environment. At the South of Lozère and the Cévennes National Park, it is nice going from village to village. Saint-Chélu-du-Tarn, Hauterives, Le Rozier, Peyreleau, Le Maynial, Sainte-Énimie, Florac, and Meyrueis.. So many villages to discover on foot or on the water from your canoe.



CAUSSE MÉJEAN



Trail		GRP & Variations
Time		8 h
Slope		500 m

On the causse, time seems to have frozen, as if it forgot to enter the modern era. The houses with stone walls and slate roofs are scattered on the landscape that changes from structured forests to arid steppes of yellow grass.

I can already imagine myself dropping my luggage in one of these renovated farms. Sheltered from the world, in contact with wilderness, animals and elements. A den of healing and contemplation. Will I ever miss the agitation of the city, the artistic and cultural activity, the meetings? Will I ever tire of the beauty of the landscape?

The Causses of Lozère, as well as the high meadows of the Aubrac or Larzac plateaus, spread this magic of open spaces and forgotten lands. By walking in unison on these paths at the edge of the world, I rediscover the sacred link that unites me to nature. There is something powerful in this hostile and sublime environment. A natural force that pushes us to continue and to surpass ourselves. In Nivoliers, we turn right to join the hike variant hike trail from Hures. Villaret is in sight. Young beige horses with upright manes are racing between the bare hills. We are entering the land of Przewalski

horses. Since 1993, the Takh association has been protecting this unique breed. The horses are raised in semi-freedom on these pebbled plateaus, before being reintroduced in the plateaus of Mongolia, their land of origin.

In Drigas, we come across a herd of sheep, guarded by their shepherd. Could it be Christian Avesque, the last shepherd of the Causse Méjean? Maybe.

He quietly guards his herd and guides it through the pastures. In his own way, he reminds us that the modern world is not everything. Did we become too hurried and impatient? On the causse, you can imagine yourself living to the rhythm of the seasons, savoring the authentic taste of simplicity and slowness with the intimate conviction that another link to nature is to be reinvented.





The Larzac Plateau

From Millau to Navacelles

154 km



Paragliding take-off site of Brunas: 44.072102, 3.06394

Crepounac Cross, Viala-du-Pas-de-Jaux: 43.9659, 3.0311



"Eco-Camping du Larzac", Millau



"Le fromage Roquefort" (Roquefort cheese)

ROQUEFORT-SUR-SOULZON

The Causse of Larzac is renowned for being the sanctuary of a unique agropastoralism in Europe. It is not surprising that Roquefort-sur-Soulzon produces the best sheep milk cheese of the same name. It is on a rocky promontory overlooking the town, at the foot of the Crepounac Cross, that we set up camp for a few nights. A wild spot that cut us off from the world, for our greatest joy, and a necessary break before getting back on the road.



NAVACELLES CIRQUE

At the foot of the Larzac Plateau, the Vis River has been digging for million of years a 300-meter-deep canyon with a spectacular panoramic view. It is pleasant to stroll through the village of Navacelles and to take a dip in the waterfalls of the Vis River, some of which are more than 8 meters high. A small oasis of greenery which contrasts with the aridity of gorges' slopes.





Lake Salagou

From Lodève to Ceyras

56 km



Moon-like landscape, St-Jean-de-la-Blaquière : 43.699001, 3.44747



The heights of Lodève: 43.720402, 3.33158

Camping Les Arcades, Octon



"La croustade Clermontaise"



SAINT-JEAN-DE-LA-BLAQUIÈRE

A deep blue lake surrounded by red hills that look like lunar landscapes. Are we still in France? Yes! We are precisely at Lake Salagou. Thanks to the Park4Night app, we find an amazing spot surrounded by "ruffes", these red rocks born from the combination of clayey sediments and iron oxides. Between the vineyards, volcanic mounds form the contours of a canyon.



LAKE SALAGOU

This freshwater basin is dotted with small beaches like the Vailhès one, which is also a water sports base. Swimming, resting, sunbathing, reading, renting a canoe or a paddleboard, walking around the lake, hiking on the heights, having a coffee on the central square of Liousson, passing on the dam, having lunch at the bar of La Roquette or dinner at the Mas de Riri restaurant: there is enough to keep you busy for several days without going far from the shores of Lake Salagou.



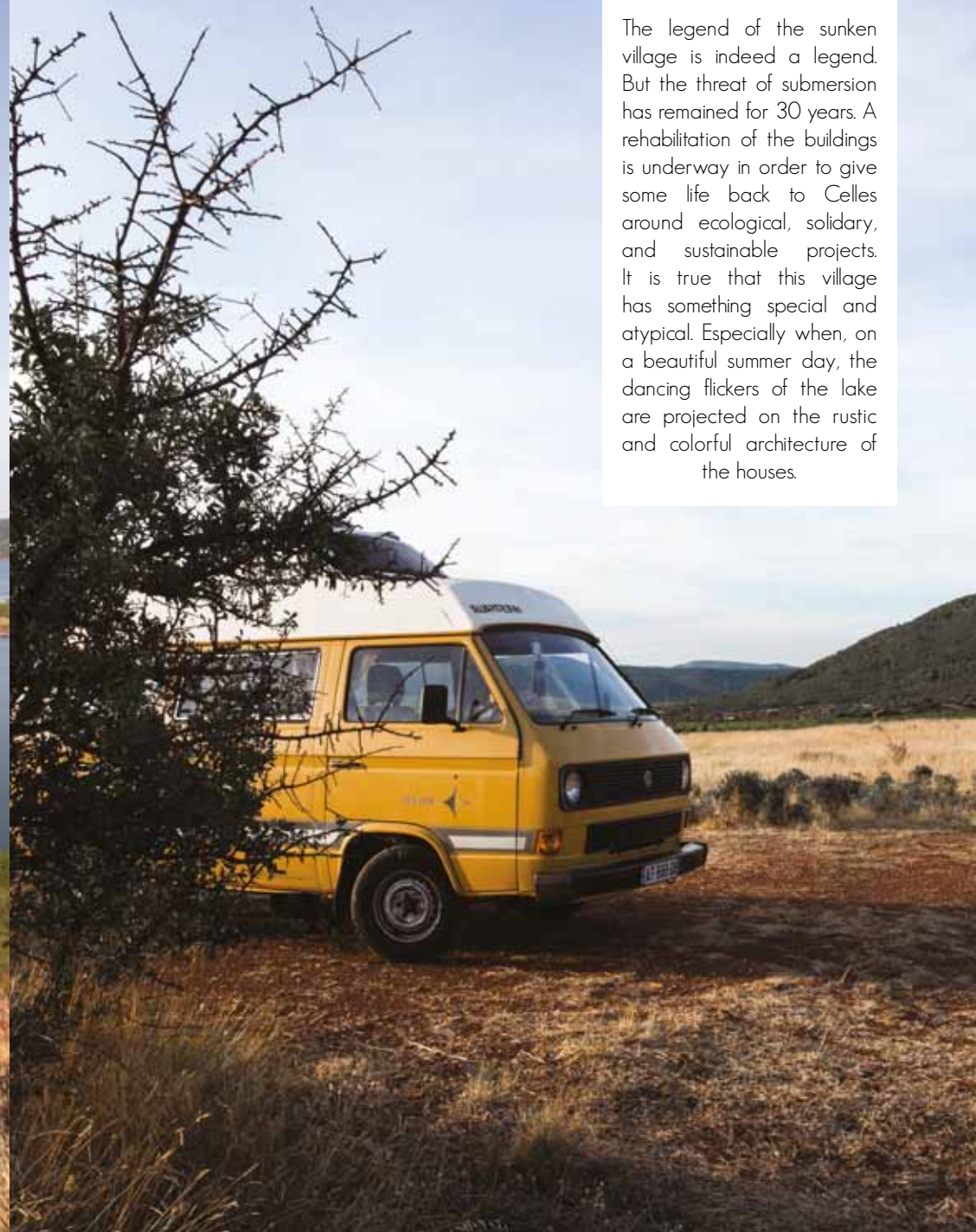
AN EXCEPTIONAL VIEW OF THE LAKE

This viewpoint is on Google Maps, under the name "La Sure". At the end of the day, when the sun rays go down and reveal the beautiful ochre highlights, it is the ideal moment to discover this exceptional panoramic view.



CELLES

The legend of the sunken village is indeed a legend. But the threat of submersion has remained for 30 years. A rehabilitation of the buildings is underway in order to give some life back to Celles around ecological, solidary, and sustainable projects. It is true that this village has something special and atypical. Especially when, on a beautiful summer day, the dancing flickers of the lake are projected on the rustic and colorful architecture of the houses.



THE PERCHED VILLAGES ROUTE — 147 km —

Tarn and Aveyron are full of small medieval towns perched on rocky promontories or above cliffs, also called "Village perché"

Lautrec

This itinerary starts in Lautrec, one of the most beautiful villages in France, with its windmill still in operation, its church, and its pastel crops. Did you know that it is this plant with yellow tones that is used to make the famous blue pastel pigment? No wonder this color is so characteristic of this region.

Puycelsi

This fortified village offers one of the most beautiful views in the region. It is classified among the most beautiful villages of France and as one of the Great Sites of Occitany. From the village, the heritage trail allows you to discover the half-timbered houses and the beautiful Grésigne Forest.

The fortress of Penne

In the heart of the Gorges of Aveyron, the Château of Penne is perched more than 120m above Grésigne Forest. Do not miss the summer medieval animations that will take you back to the time of knights and princesses.

The perched city of Cordes-sur-Ciel

Probably one of the prettiest medieval perched cities in France, with its gothic houses and its ancient fortifications. You will probably be charmed twice: first when discovering it proudly perched on its rocky spur from a nearby road and then when wandering through its pretty cobbled streets.

Najac

This medieval village perched on a rocky outcrop presents itself with a single street in all its length. Its fortified castle dating back to the 13th century has been classified as a historical monument. You must visit it!

One last stop in Villefranche-de-Rouergue

Do not hesitate to get lost in the maze of narrow streets of the village. On Thursday and Saturday mornings, the streets and squares are transformed to the rhythm of the market stalls. A great opportunity to discover the architectural heritage of the city between two tastings of local products.





Camargue

From Montpellier to Port-Saint-Louis

155 km



In the middle of nowhere: 43.446201, 4.61554



"Le Mas de la Fouque", Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer



"La fougasse d'Aigues-Mortes"



WATCHING PINK FLAMINGOS

The pink flamingos are the big stars of Camargue, even if there are no less than 400 other bird species. It is the only place in France where they can be seen. Migratory by nature, you will nevertheless have no difficulty to see them, no matter the season: they live in Camargue all year round. To observe them, go next to Fangassier Pond (on the condition of respecting their habitat and not venturing off the paths), behind Beauduc Beach, or at the ornithological park of Pont de Gau in Saintes-Marie-de-la-Mer.



IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

You can not go to Camargue without taking, at least once, a track that leads to the middle of nowhere. Between Galabert Pond, Fangassier Pond and Clos Desclaux, this spot should allow you to observe pink flamingos if you have not done it yet. To get there, the easiest way is to start from the Mas de Saint-Bertrand. Once you arrive on the parking lot, you can walk along the paths and observe the fauna and flora. We spent the night there.



SAINTES-MARIES-DE-LA-MER

In the southwest of Camargue, Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer is its capital. It is a high place of pilgrimage to pay homage to the patron saint, Sara, the Black Virgin, but also a renowned seaside resort. The history of this city, with its pink tiled roofs and its imposing fortified church, can be traced back to the 4th century. In summer, many festivities around horses and bulls take place, such as the Fête Votive, the FERIA du Cheval or the Abrivado Festival. When visiting Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, do not miss the view from the roof of the church, with the sea in the distance!



The Calanques

From Marseilles to Aix-en-Provence

106 km



Between Aubagne and Cassis: 43.253738, 5.624138



"Camping du Garlaban", Aubagne



"Les panisses"



"O VRAC": 33 rue des 3 mages, Marseille

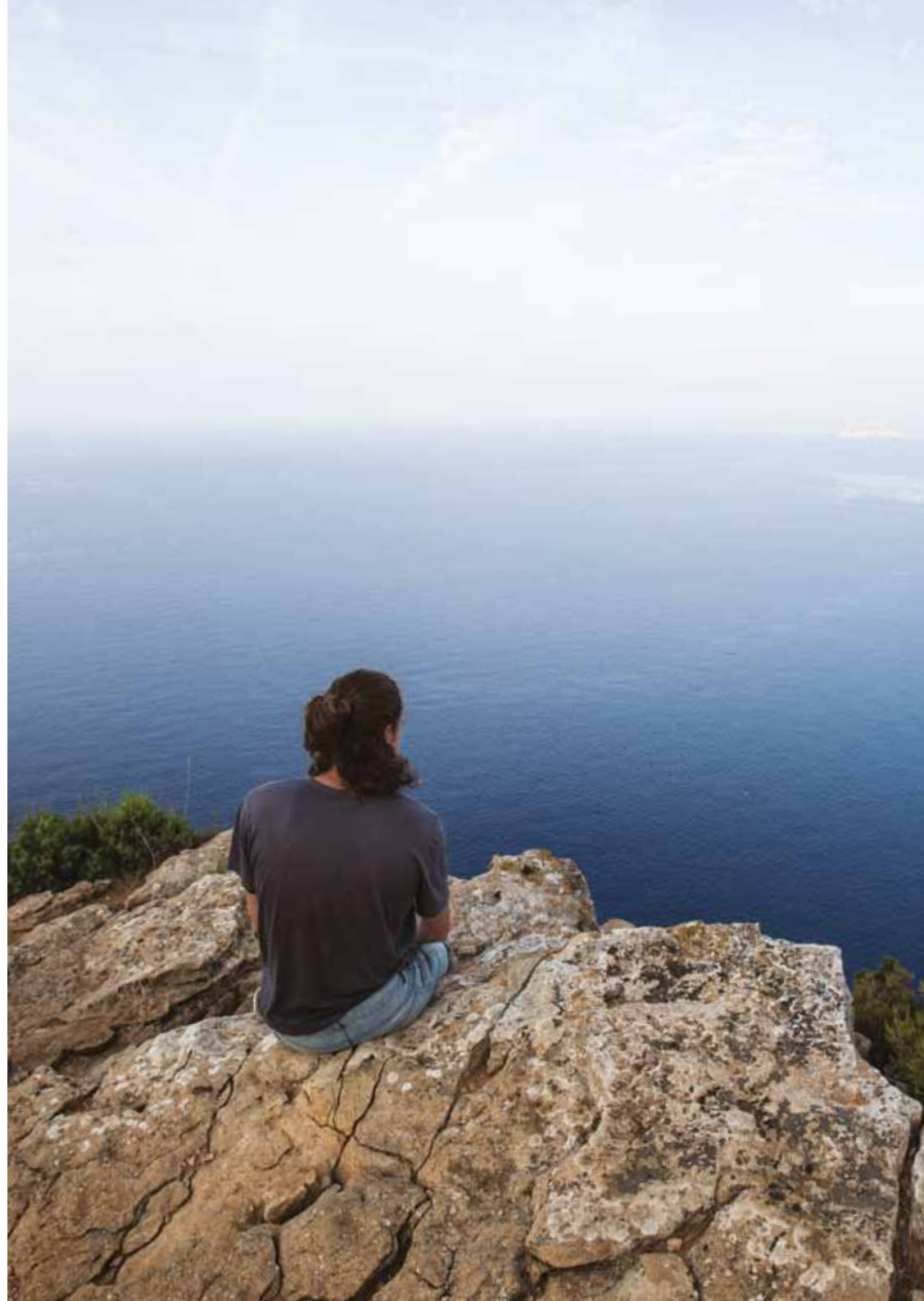
THE CALANQUES

It is impossible to visit the Calanques National Park without taking a swim in one of these creeks with turquoise waters surrounded by rocks. These natural pools are popular with both locals and tourists, so much so that there is a golden rule: the more accessible the cove the more likely it is to be crowded. Callelongue, Port Pin, En Vau, Sormiou and Morgiou are among the most beautiful creeks of the region.



CAMPING DU GARLABAN

In the heart of Mediterranean Provence, here is an atypical site which takes advantage from both the proximity of the city and a totally isolated setting. The Camping du Garlaban is located at the foot of the Garlaban range, in the heart of the landscapes so dear to Marcel Pagnol. Connected in 20 minutes by train to the Saint-Charles station of Marseille, it is the closest campsite to the Old Port. Ideal to rest and recharge for a few days if you can not camp in the Calanques with your van.



THE RIDGES ROUTE

Vertiginous. This is the adjective that best fits this incredible portion of 15 km that connects Cassis to La Ciotat. In a Volkswagen T3, the climb was done in 1st gear. The engine was rumbling like never before. The road is not recommended for motor homes: a sign indicating a 20% slope can be enough to discourage more than one traveler. Once on the heights of Cape Canaille, take the opportunity to stop at the numerous belvederes and viewpoints of Cassis and the sapphire blue Mediterranean Sea.





The Alpilles

From Mouriès to Eygalières

54 km



In the scrubland, near Eygalières: 43.757555, 4.924106



"Ferme des Amandaies" Farm campsite, Mouriès



"La tapenade aux olives noires"



"Autrement Vrac": 49 rue de l'Horloge, Salon de Provence



N
▲ 6 km

SAINT-RÉMY-DE-PROVENCE

Saint-Rémy-de-Provence is a city where it is good to walk, sheltered from the sun in its narrow streets. Markets of local producers and small grocery stores with local specialties add to the fresh limestone a warm and lively atmosphere: almost ten thousand inhabitants live there year-round. It is the small capital of the Alpilles. Numerous cultural events take place every year such as the Fête du Vin et de l'Artisanat d'Art, the Transhumance, the FERIA, and the Saint-Rémy-de-Provence Carnival.



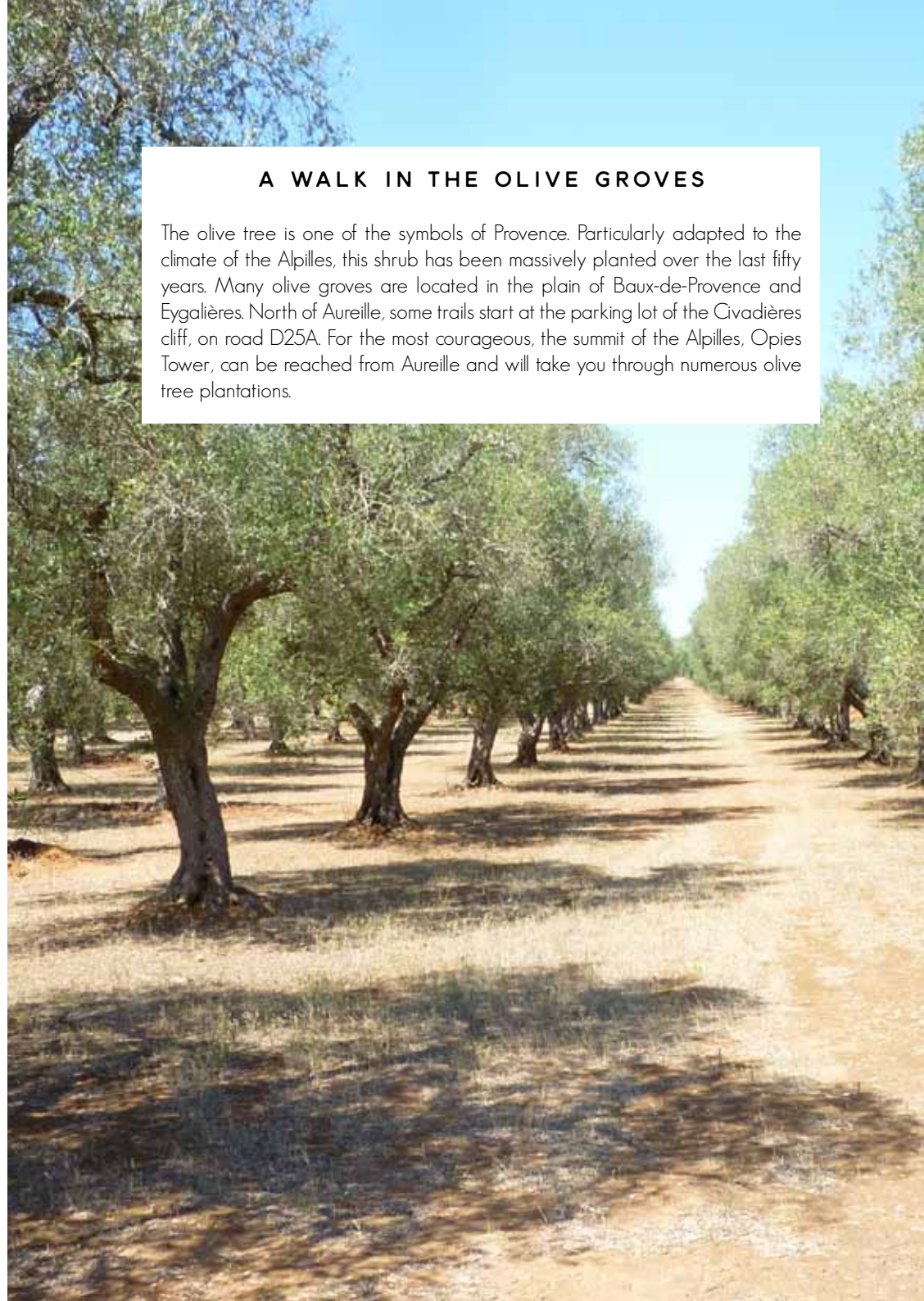
EYGALIÈRES

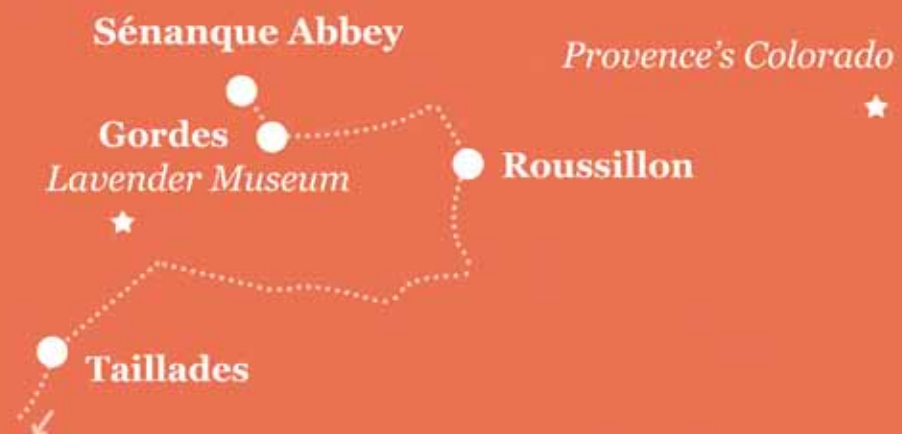
Ten kilometers away from Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, the small village of Eygalières has assets: a rocky outcrop on which a statue of the Virgin is enthroned, fields of olive trees as far as the eye can see, traditional limestone buildings and a smell of lavender that perfumes the streets. The wine and olive producers are numerous in the area and with there is the opportunity to sleep on their farms. In Eygalières, make a stop at the Saint-Sixte Chapel, lost in the middle of the Alpilles scrubland: the place is conducive to meditation and contemplation.



A WALK IN THE OLIVE GROVES

The olive tree is one of the symbols of Provence. Particularly adapted to the climate of the Alpilles, this shrub has been massively planted over the last fifty years. Many olive groves are located in the plain of Baux-de-Provence and Eygalières. North of Aureille, some trails start at the parking lot of the Civadières cliff, on road D25A. For the most courageous, the summit of the Alpilles, Opies Tower, can be reached from Aureille and will take you through numerous olive tree plantations.





N
▲ 10 km



The Luberon

Loop around Taillades

64 km



Taillades : 43.834, 5.09203



"Le sorbet à la lavande" (Lavender sorbet)



"Le Sentier des Ogres"

SÉNANQUE ABBEY

A perfect example of 12th century Cistercian architecture, the Abbey of Notre-Dame de Sénanque is as elegant as it is mysterious. Surrounded by fields of lavender that bloom from mid-June to early August, the energizing purple of the plants contrasts with the gray tones of the weathered limestone. Still inhabited by monks, the abbey can be visited throughout the year, especially to discover the abbey church, the cloister, and the old dormitory.



GORGES

It is the perched village of Provence as we imagine it and one of the most famous in the Luberon Regional Natural Park. Located on the southern side of the foothills of the Vaucluse Mountains, the traditional white and dry-stone houses contrast with the emerald green of the surrounding vegetation. At the top of the hill sits its castle, impassive for centuries of observation. Take the time to get lost in its maze of alleys by going off the beaten track.



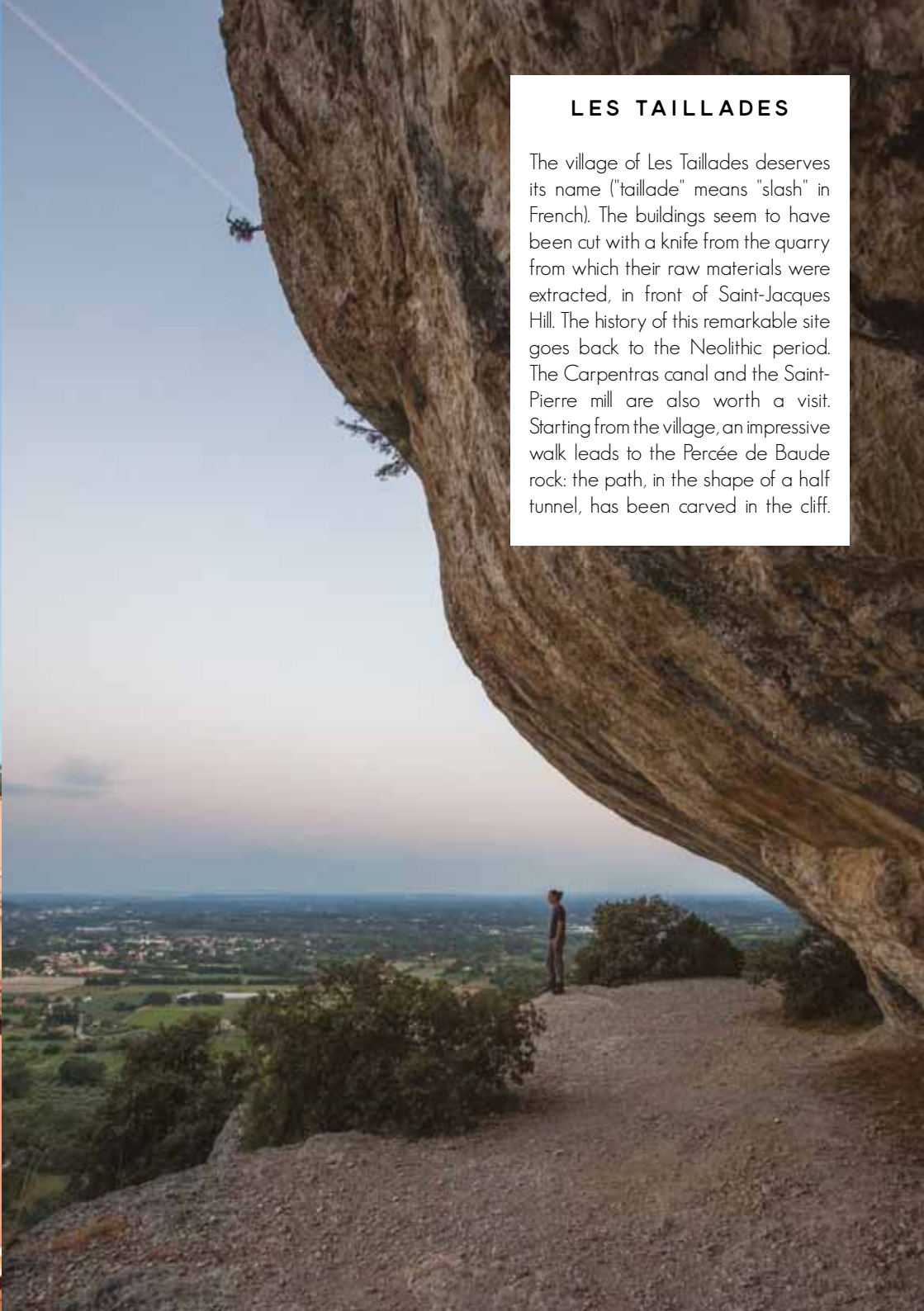
ROUSSILLON

Roussillon is one of the most beautiful villages in France, and its title is highly deserved. A real favorite during our road trip, the surprise was total when we discovered with our own eyes the pink-orange tones of the houses' facades. Without any doubt, it is a gem of the Luberon. The site is also famous for its ochre quarries with pigments ranging from yellow to purple. A one-hour loop is suggested in the amazing scenery of the Sentier des Ocre for three or four euros per person.



LES TAILLADES

The village of Les Taillasses deserves its name ("taillass" means "slash" in French). The buildings seem to have been cut with a knife from the quarry from which their raw materials were extracted, in front of Saint-Jacques Hill. The history of this remarkable site goes back to the Neolithic period. The Carpentras canal and the Saint-Pierre mill are also worth a visit. Starting from the village, an impressive walk leads to the Percée de Baude rock: the path, in the shape of a half tunnel, has been carved in the cliff.



SENTIER DES OCRES

Pierre's

FAVORITE MOMENT



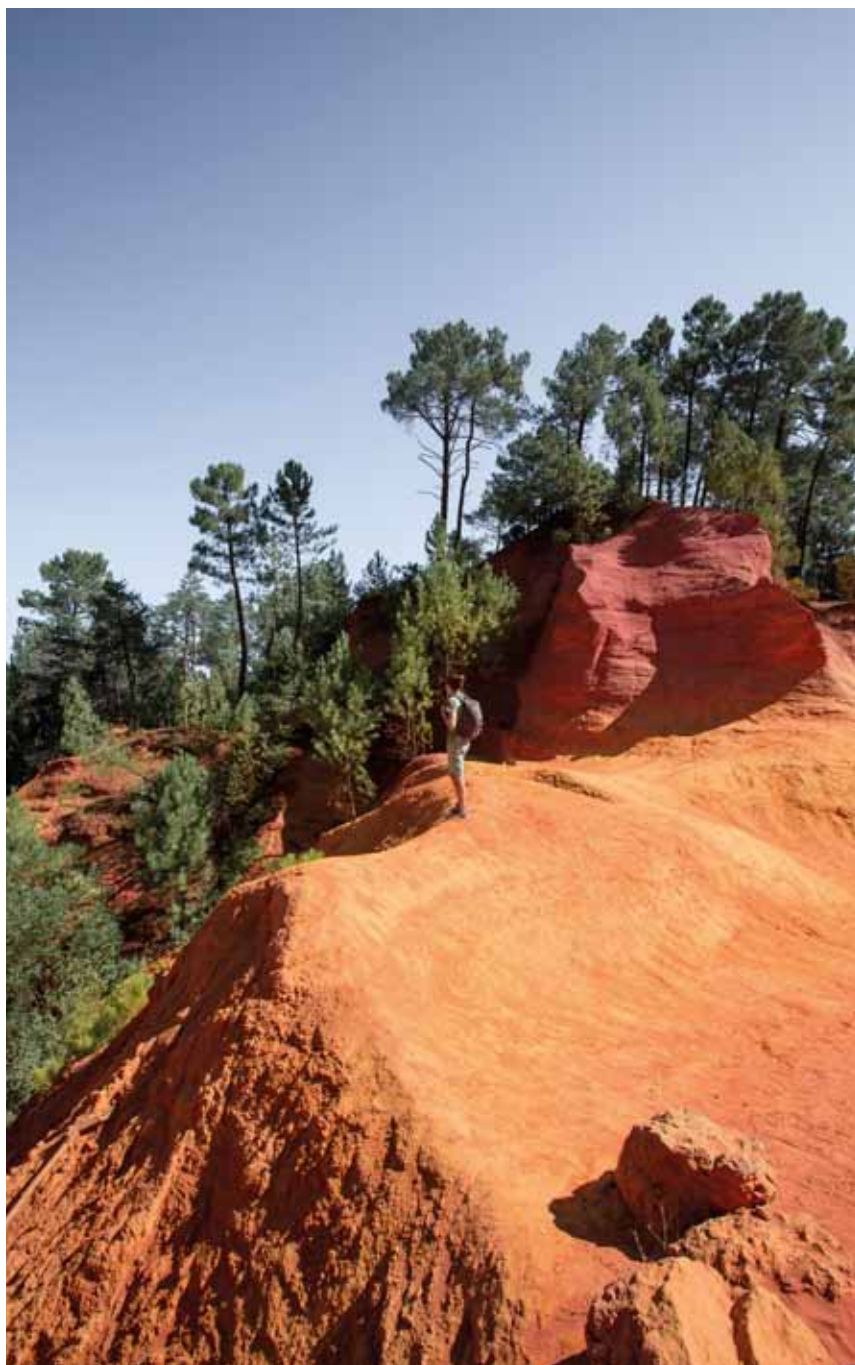
One of the goals of this tour of France in a van was to discover of these places full of a singular beauty, able to transport us to the other side of the world. As soon as we arrived in the Luberon, we were advised to go to Provence's Colorado. If we were to believe the name of this place, it would fit into this theme.

After having visited the superb, perched village of Gordes, and back on the road, our eyes were attracted by some cliffs with orange tones that we could see in the distance, towards the east.

Without questioning the fact that this amber mount belonged to the famous Provence's Colorado, it is only later that we would realize to have confused the latter, located in Rustrel, with the Sentier des Ogres of Roussillon. But what does it matter: the place was just as impressive. The village of Roussillon contrasts in the emerald green landscape by its pink facades. Seeing it for the first time, we have the impression of having a painting of a great impressionist master in front of us. This connection with painting seems even more relevant when, after parking, we notice a flayed cliff side that reveals its bright pink interior.

We decide to find out more and follow the sign indicating "Sentier des Ogres". After paying the entrance fee to the old quarries, we opt for the 50-minute itinerary. The place is remarkable, and the change of scenery is total: It is like we are in America in the Grand Canyon region. The walk inside this Provencal pine forest leads us from one ochre range to the other. Some are rather clear, with shades of yellow, and others much darker, going towards purple. They all have in common the fact that they have been polished by the elements after this former industrial site was returned to nature. With each hour of the day and each season, the colors and their shapes change.

It may not be the official Provence's Colorado, but it will clearly remain our own Colorado.



THE PAINTERS ROUTE

— 302 km —

This itinerary will appeal to art lovers and especially to those who want to immerse themselves in the world that inspired the famous painters Van Gogh, Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso. The tour will take place in four stages from Saint-Rémy-de-Provence to Antibes.

On the Lands of Van Gogh

We all know Van Gogh's paintings of wheat, sunflower, or lavender fields. Or this painting which depicts, still in pointillism, a famous blue room. In Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, a walking tour guides you through the scenery that inspired the painter so much. In the city of Arles, a seven-step tour awaits you to discover the key sites that inspired Van Gogh, including the Café Terrace at Night painting.

In the intimacy of Cézanne

In Aix-en-Provence, you can enter the intimacy of Cézanne by visiting his workshop or his family home. You will find there the original furniture, all his working material, as well as the famous models of his still lives.

A nod to Matisse

In Vence near Cannes, stop by the Rosaire Chapel, entirely designed and decorated by Matisse, with its colorful stained-glass windows and murals. There, you will find the whole universe of the painter.

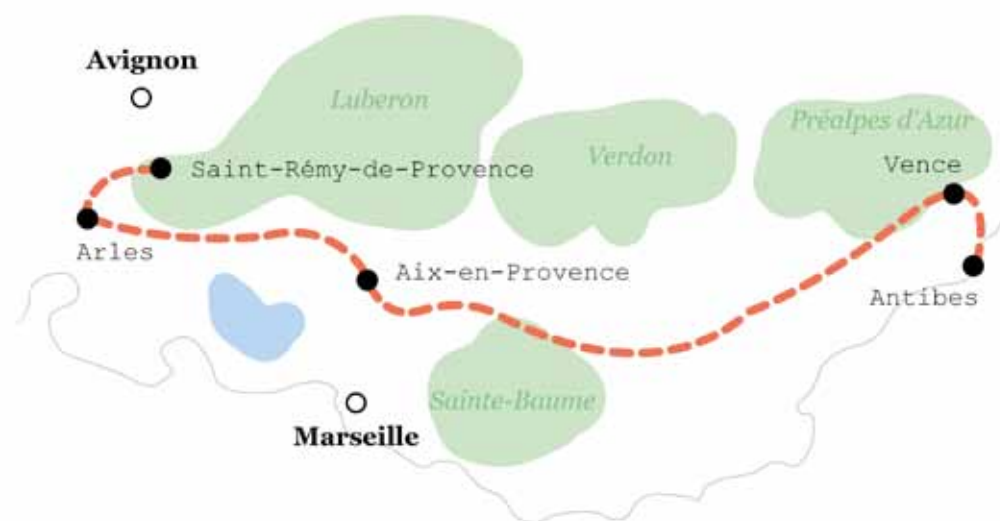
The Picasso Museum

On the road, we recommend you to visit the Picasso Museum in Antibes. A superb building with a sea view and a collection of the most famous paintings of the painter.

A stop in Antibes is also an opportunity to stroll through its streets to discover small craftsmen stores. In 2017, the town was awarded the label "Ville métiers d'art".

Porcelain shop:

"Les Petites Porcelaines de Justine",
in Vallauris



THE WINDING ROAD OF THE GREAT ALPS

— 730 km —

How could you miss this mythical road? Whether you explore it by bike, on foot, on two wheels or in a campervan, this road makes us all dream. And there is a reason for this. The road of the Great Alps, 730 km long between Thonon-les-Bains and Nice, takes us up to four legendary passes, through charming alpine villages and across three exceptional national parks.

From Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean Sea

It is certain that with Georges we could not have followed this route. His little engine would have failed along the way. It is important to remember that the four main passes of this route reach 2764m (Iseran Pass), 2677m (Galibier Pass), 2360m (Izoard Pass) and 2327m (Cayolle Pass). Remember to check your engine oil and coolant levels before every new stage!

A stop at the Napoleon refuge

Whether it is for a gourmet meal or for a night in a real room, our favorite place is the Napoleon refuge at Izoard Pass. We are sure that you will find a warm and friendly atmosphere in this refuge.

Some ideas of hikes around the road of the Great Alps

Vanoise National Park

Hike to Lake Plan d'Amont from Aussois

Écrins National Park

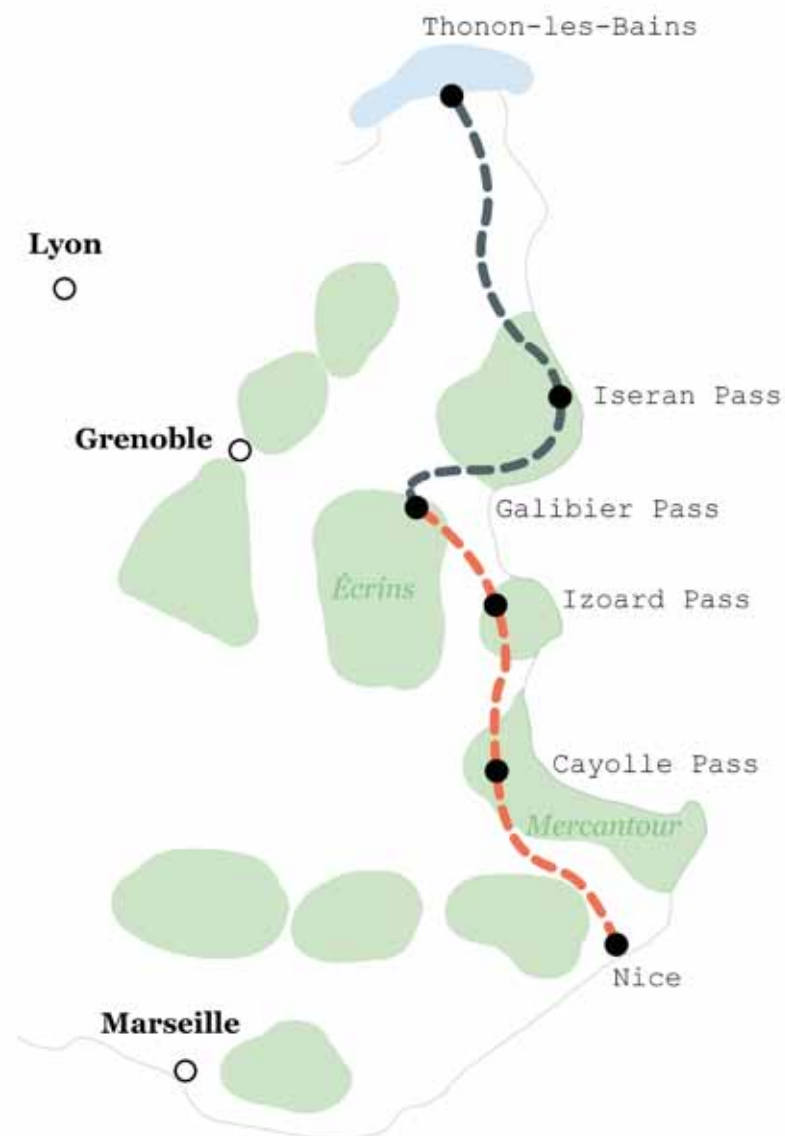
Hike to Lake Eychauda from Chambran

Mercantour National Park

Hike from Lake Lauzanier to La Croix from Larche

Natural landscapes worth the detour

It is certain that on a panoramic road like this one, we could spend entire days driving with our hair in the wind. But a nice hike from time to time would not hurt our legs. Amongst the Vanoise, Écrins, Mercantour national parks and the Queyras Regional Natural Park, there is plenty to do.





From Isère to Savoie

From Saint-Romans to Lake Aiguebelette

235 km



Herretang Peatland: 45.390499, 5.71314



"Camping du Château", Beauvoir-en-Royans

"Abri de l'Essaure", Mountain refuge, Chichilianne (Vercors)



"Le gâteau au noix" (Walnut Cake)



"Day by day": 48 rue Madier de Montjau, Valence

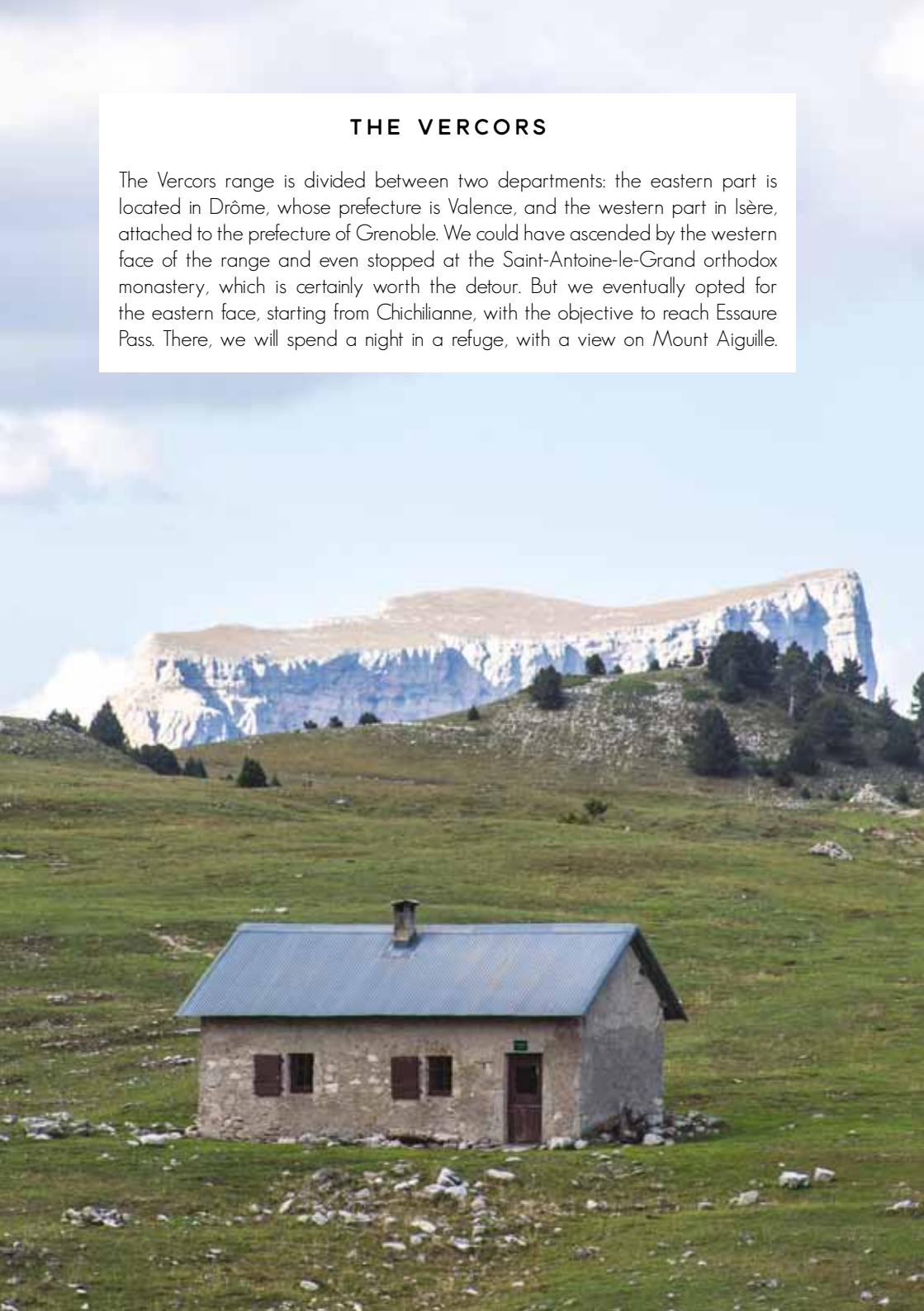


From Chichilianne to Essaure Pass



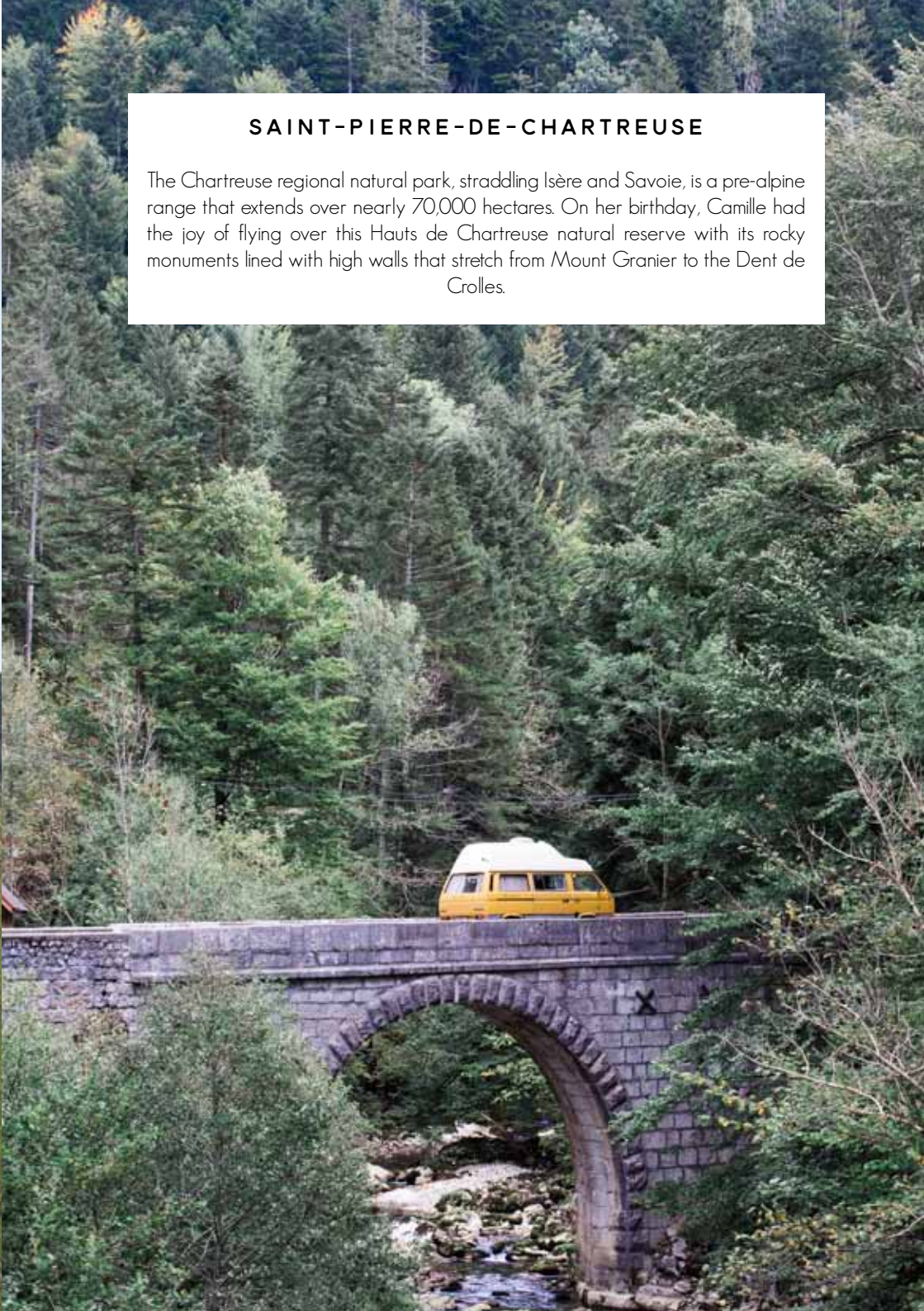
THE VERCORS

The Vercors range is divided between two departments: the eastern part is located in Drôme, whose prefecture is Valence, and the western part in Isère, attached to the prefecture of Grenoble. We could have ascended by the western face of the range and even stopped at the Saint-Antoine-le-Grand orthodox monastery, which is certainly worth the detour. But we eventually opted for the eastern face, starting from Chichilianne, with the objective to reach Essaure Pass. There, we will spend a night in a refuge, with a view on Mount Aiguille.



SAINT-PIERRE-DE-CHARTREUSE

The Chartreuse regional natural park, straddling Isère and Savoie, is a pre-alpine range that extends over nearly 70,000 hectares. On her birthday, Camille had the joy of flying over this Hauts de Chartreuse natural reserve with its rocky monuments lined with high walls that stretch from Mount Granier to the Dent de Crolles.



THE CLIMB OF CHARMANT SOM

In summer, there are many hikes to do in the Chartreuse. Like the one that climbs to the Hauts de Chartreuse natural reserve or Chamechaude. The Charmant Som is a summit that remains easily accessible in summer and winter. You just have to follow the road that winds up to the Charmant Som Inn, then finish the climb by following the path to the cross.



LAKE AIGUEBELETTE

If you decide to go to Savoie, stop at the beach of Lake Aiguebelette for a refreshing swim in its emerald waters. This lake has a remarkable ecosystem and classified and protected natural areas. An 18 km trail allows you to go around the lake to discover its wild coasts, islets, marshes, and reed beds.



VERCORS MOUNTAIN REFUGE



Trail		Essaure Pass
Time		10 h
Slope		1000 m

Early in the morning, we park Georges on the parking lot of Saint-Georges-de-Commiers and take the train to Celles. This will save him another difficult climb, and us another stressful one. We follow the signs to Chichilianne, then start the climb with the Essaure Pass path.

The trail passes through a forest and climbs to 1695 m of altitude. It is not very difficult, but the slope is about 800 m.

Once the pass is passed, we enter in the reserve of the High Plateaus of Vercors which represents 10% of the size of the natural park. We find our home for the night: the Essaure refuge. An unguarded cabin which can shelter up to six hikers for the night. We will go back down tomorrow with the same path.

After a light sleep kind of night, lying on the wooden floor and visited many times by mice, we pack up at dawn. We walk to the highest point of the Parquet Rocks ridge to watch the sunrise. A chamois crosses our path at high speed, surprised to see us on its way so early. The wind

is fresh, it whistles in our ears and whips our face.

We find a small promontory of pebbles, perfect to lean against. Wrapped up in our comforter, we silently and emotionally watch the celestial ritual.

The star gradually colors the sky with a pinkish-orange glow, accentuating the contrast of the jagged shapes of the distant ranges behind which it hides. Mount Aiguille reveals itself more majestic than ever.





Bourgogne-Franche-Comté

From Dole to Morvan

203 km



Baverans : 47.096616, 5.539596



Pernand-Vergelesses : 47.085602, 4.8531



"Domaine de la Pierre Ronde", Saint-Martin-de-la-Mer



"Le pain d'épice du Morvan" (Morvan Gingerbread)



"La reserve Bio", Auxonne
(online orders and various pickup points)

Walking among the vines



DOLE

Nothing predestined us to stop in Dole during our road trip. It is above all its media library and its access to internet which motivated this stop. Sometimes you have to expect nothing to make the most beautiful discoveries. Dole seems to be a small, peaceful, and charming Jura town, where it is nice to stroll on a sunny day. Follow the "Chat perché" tourist circuit which will guide you to the emblematic sites of Dole's heritage. Every year at the end of September, the city hosts a huge gourmet market for a weekend.



THE CLIFFS OF SAINT-ROMAIN

As we take a break for lunch, we discover the steep cliffs of Saint-Romain, one of the oldest villages in the region. Several trails, including the "Sentier des Roches", propose to hike on the heights of these characteristic cliffs overlooking the vineyards of the Hautes-Côtes.



THE MORVAN

The Morvan, on the borders of Nièvre, Côte-d'Or, Yonne, and Saône-et-Loire, is one of the 54 regional nature parks in France. This granite range, in the heart of Bourgogne, also offers pleasant outings between peaks, rivers, waterfalls and large lakes. We choose Lake Settons which is often said to have Scandinavian allures. During the summer, the site is transformed into a family nautical base, but in this season, nothing disturbs the tranquility of the waters.

AMONG THE VINES

Pierre's

FAVORITE MOMENT



After long weeks exploring the south-east of France, its perched villages and its deserted scrubland, the coolness of the ocean calls us. More than six hundred kilometers away, we can feel the caress of the sea spray. Also, we absolutely must be in Paris at the end of the week for a book signing at the Librairie du Québec.

Pressed by time and the desire for a blue horizon, we set off northwest, towards Dole, then Beaune. Until the vision of vineyards as far as the eye can see stops us in our tracks.

The palette of colors of their diaphanous leaves, scorched by the heat of the sun of the past months, ranges from olive green to ruby red. Here, the fall is already well underway. The temperatures are also not the same anymore. Dressed in a t-shirt and shorts two days ago, I can now wear a sweater and a scarf.

The evening light shaves the plain. The rays dazzle me, but struggle to warm me up. Without any difficulty, they pierce the thin leaves of the vines and illuminate them by transparency. The Côte d'Or (Golden Coast) deserves its name. A light breeze starts to make them dance in unison, to the rhythm of the noise of Georges' tired engine.

The opportunity is too good: we take advantage of this such particular atmosphere to dare to get lost in the maze of dirt roads. In this autumnal field, Georges seems to be in his element: the color of his body blends perfectly with the landscape. As far as we can see, we can not distinguish any house. A handful of wine growers, crossed on the way, greet us with a smile and a hand gesture before going back to work.

Tonight, we will camp on the heights of Pernand-Vergelesses. And tomorrow? Although the idea of exploring the area further is appealing, we will head back to Île de France. We are only passing through. So, serene, we remind ourselves that these moments of sweetness can neither be caught nor provoked: they are always offered to us when we least expect it.

THE LAKES OF JURA ROUTE — 67 km —

During our tour of France, we spent two nights in Dole, without really giving this department time to reveal its most beautiful panoramas. Did you know that there is a lake route in Jura? This route, which winds over nearly 150 km, links the most beautiful Jura lakes, including Lake Antre, Lake Etival and Lake Bonlieu. The itinerary allows us to discover the twenty lakes of the region by linking the main natural or tourist sites of the department.

Lake Chalain

You could, for example, start this circuit with Lake Chalain, the largest natural lake of Jura, with an incredibly turquoise water. It is the ideal setting for a short stop for a swim or paddle on the lake.

The Hérisson waterfalls

Going down the waterfall route along Lake Chambly and Lake Val, you can walk to discover the tumultuous torrent of the Hérisson river which reveals seven beautiful waterfalls shaped by nature over the years.

The Belvedere of the Four Lakes

On the way to Lake Bonlieu, you should not miss the Belvedere of the Four Lakes at the Pic de l'Aigle. This peak culminates at 993 m of altitude and dominates the valley of the Four Lakes which includes the lakes of Narlay, Ilay, Petit and Grand Maclu.

Lake Bonlieu

The small glacial lake of Bonlieu, surrounded by forests, is perhaps one of the wildest and most picturesque of Jura. Especially at the beginning of fall when trees are colored with a thousand shades of red.

Lake Vouglans

Lake Vouglans, considered to be the seaside resort of Jura, impresses by its surface: 35 km long which makes it the third artificial lake of France. A belvedere on the Bellecin Plateau has been built to offer a panoramic view of the lake. What you should know is that at the end of the lake is the Vouglans hydroelectric dam of the company EDF. With its 103m of height, it is the third largest dam in France. Impressive!

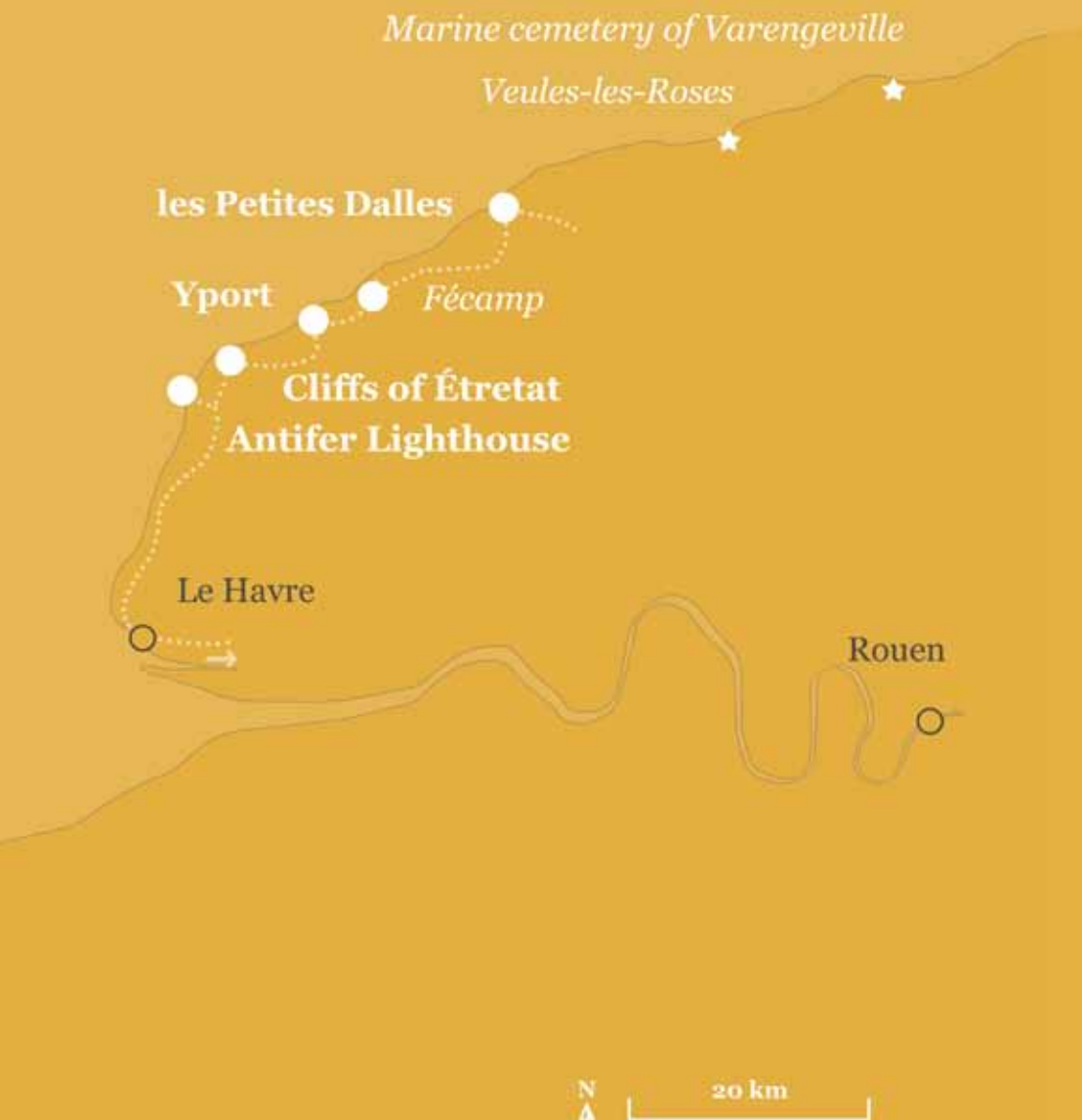




The Alabaster Coast

From Les Petites Dalles to Le Havre

64 km



Les Petites Dalles, St-Martin-aux-Buneaux : 49.825317, 0.524841

"Le Croquet", Octeville-sur-Mer : 49.557338, 0.091931



"Camping la Pâtur", Yport



"Les sablés normands" (Normandy cookies)



Arrival to the seashore

THE CLIFFS OF FÉCAMP

The cliffs of Étretat are not the only cliffs worth a visit. The Alabaster Coast, also known as the Côte d'Albâtre, extends over more than 130 km along the English Channel and offers magnificent views on both sides of the limestone and flint cliffs, sometimes more than a hundred meters high. In the vicinity of Fécamp, Saint-Pierre-en-Port gives access to a tiny fishing port. Cape Fagnet, at the entrance of the city, also offers a clear view of the coastline.



YPORT

Yport is a small, quiet, and picturesque seaside resort that we discover at random during a detour. Its charming little beach huts are not without reminding us of those of Dinard in Brittany. It is the ideal place to rest on the sand and enjoy the soft rays of the sun.



ÉTRETAT

The most beautiful circuit of the cliffs of Étretat passes by the plain of Valaine, joins the coast from the cliff of Aval and follows the coastal path in direction of Étretat. It then passes by the Pointe de la Courtine, the panorama of the Pisseuses de la Valaine and the Chemin des Douaniers. Take a look at the impressive hole in the cliff at the beginning of the Chemin des Douaniers. You can even climb on the famous pierced cliff!



CAPE ANTIFER LIGHTHOUSE

This lighthouse, one of the highest in France, offers a superb view of the English Channel and you can even spend the night there in a van if the site is not crowded. A path goes down to the beach and connects with the GR21 trail, newly marked out as part of the development of the coastal path. That evening, we preferred to sleep at the spot of the Croquet in Octeville-sur-Mer.



SEASHORE

Pierre's

FAVORITE MOMENT



Here we are. The ocean spreads out before us and plunges into the depths of the horizon. The iodized air whips our face. The cries of the herring gulls echo in our ears like a childhood nursery rhyme that we had forgotten.

To their bawling mingles the song of the halyards, these metal pulleys that beat against the masts of the boats in a unique cadence. In the distance, the surf roars against the immense cliffs of unperturbed limestone. No doubt about it: we are well and truly arrived on the Normandy coastline.

After three and a half months of travelling in the south of France, driven as much by our spontaneous desires as by the need to visit the biggest bookstores to drop off our books, it felt strange. Having to drive more than 600 kilometers, forced to ignore the landscape that was passing by in the rearview mirrors, left me with a bitter taste. We who love to discover a region as we wander around, were caught in a crazy race against time. Arriving in Paris in time for our appointment, this haste made us realize how late we were on our initial project. Originally, we had three months to do this tour of France in a converted van. But here we are: the fourth month

was already well underway, we had only visited the South, and at this rate, in one year we will still be on the French roads.

When we got out of the van in Les Petites Dalles and saw the blue and intoxicating horizon, all these preoccupations vanished in a flash. The sun sets, shining orange tones on the imposing surface of the cliffs. The water sparkles with a thousand lights. The sea air is crisp and clean. The present moment catches us, Camille and I, without warning. A strong and powerful emotion surges through me, like a silent groundswell. In the bright reflection of our respective eyes, a mixture of serenity and plenitude. In silence, hand in hand, we contemplate the landscape that offers itself before us for long minutes. Faced with such a spectacle, how can we not be confident in what the future holds for us?





Calvados & English Channel

From Honfleur to Mont-Saint-Michel

196 km



Breuil Woods, Honfleur: 49.40708, 0.193979

Pointe du Groin du Sud, Vains: 48.656502, -1.44488



"L'arbre aux étoiles", Fatouville-Grestain



"Le cidre de Normandie" (Normandy cider)



"La maison du vrac": Rue de Gémare, Caen



Honfleur Market

Sunset on the Mont-Saint-Michel Bay



HONFLEUR

Honfleur is a popular port for tourists, and it is easy to see why: cobbled streets, half-timbered houses, small stores of local designers, artists and craftsmen, a photogenic harbor and a friendly and enticing weekly market.



BREUIL WOODS

These woods on the edge of the coast, which are not indicated on any map, are a beautiful discovery. As described on the website of the tourist office of Normandy: "Rhododendrons, alleys of beech and trees with amazing shapes welcome the walkers. A loop of about 5 km offers beautiful views of the Seine Bay. Indeed, these woods give off a very special atmosphere, almost mystical. Especially in the early morning when the first rays pierce through the branches. Without even starting to look for mushrooms, we come across some beautiful ceps.



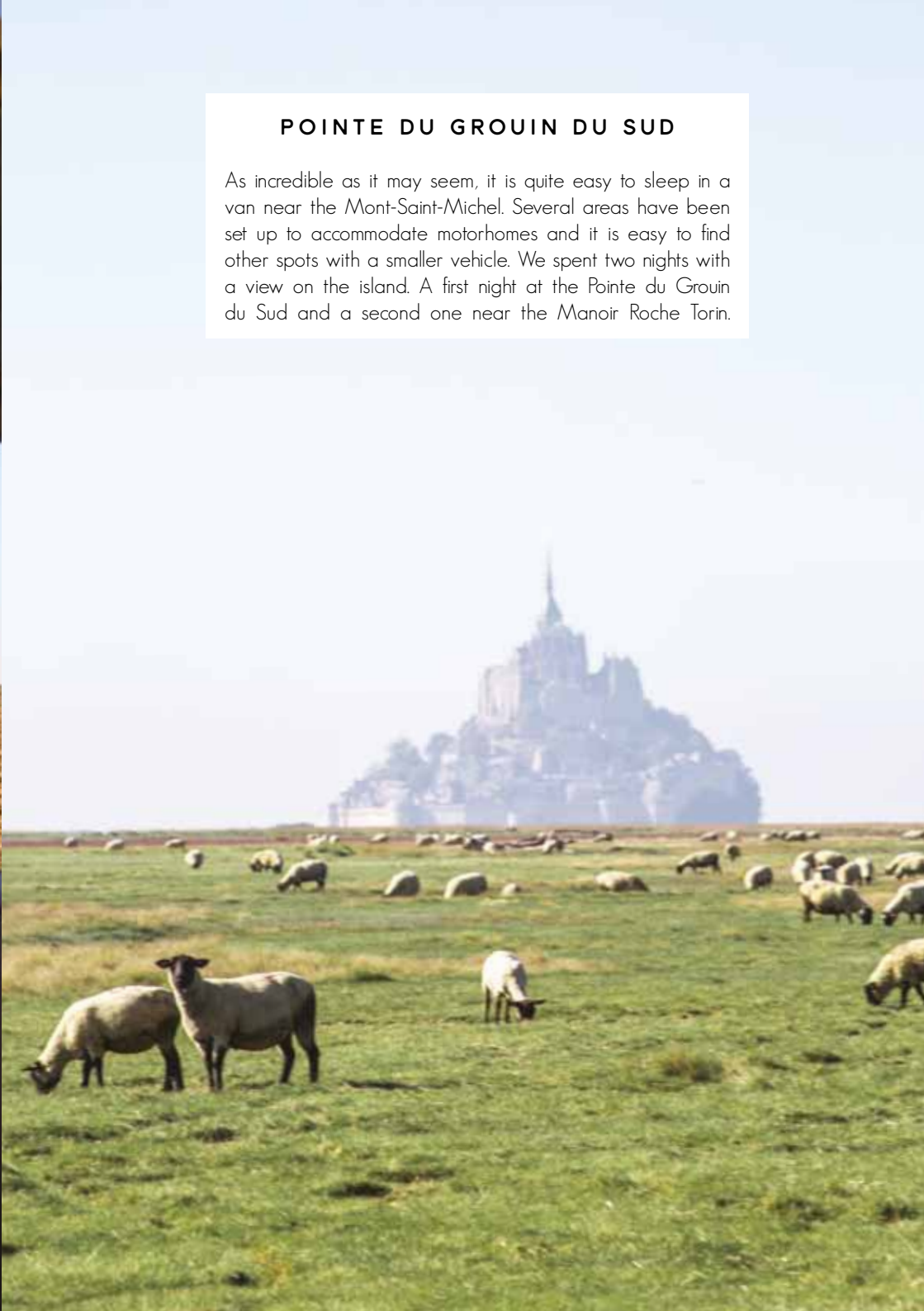
LE MONT-SAINT-MICHEL

When we talk about Mont-Saint-Michel, we mostly think about the Breton coast: it is on this side of the bay that it is the most easily accessible by car. But the famous rock, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is also easily visible from the Normandy coast in the English Channel.



POINTE DU GROUIN DU SUD

As incredible as it may seem, it is quite easy to sleep in a van near the Mont-Saint-Michel. Several areas have been set up to accommodate motorhomes and it is easy to find other spots with a smaller vehicle. We spent two nights with a view on the island. A first night at the Pointe du Grouin du Sud and a second one near the Manoir Roche Torin.



HONFLEUR MARKET

Camille's

FAVORITE MOMENT



We are already in the middle of October, the summer has left its place to the new fall colors. The fresh air of the coast brings us some comfort after these hot summer months. We take out our warm jackets, which we had not touched for four months, and which are well stored under the bed.

Our first stop in Calvados will be Honfleur. I really wanted to show Pierre this old port lined with houses dating from the 16th to the 18th century, covered with slates and sometimes with half-timbering.

cheeses, pastries, flowers, clothes, jewelry... The crowd strolls indiscriminately from one stand to another, attracted by the sometimes sweet, sometimes salty scent of local products and seafood.

It is difficult not to be tempted by an improvised tasting session.

By chance, today (Saturday) is market day in Honfleur. An unmissable event for the inhabitants of the village and of the surrounding area who come for the occasion.

We get tempted by two "Becs de Fiers" (a pastry close to the apple turnover but filled with an apple-rhubarb mixture) and buy a dozen eggs to prepare an omelet with the ceps we harvested in the Breuil Woods this morning.

On the harbor, the atmosphere is jovial and relaxed. Couples, friends, and families who seem to be celebrating the beginning of the weekend with a drink occupy all the sunny terraces. In the alleys of the historic center are installed dozens of stands presenting a wide range of local gastronomy: fruits and vegetables,



MONT-SAINT-MICHEL

Pierre's
FAVORITE MOMENT



Originally from Brittany, Mont-Saint-Michel, often called the Pearl of the West, has long been a classic of our vacations. Every year, its narrow streets full of history attract millions of visitors from all over the world, jostling each other to reach its abbey.

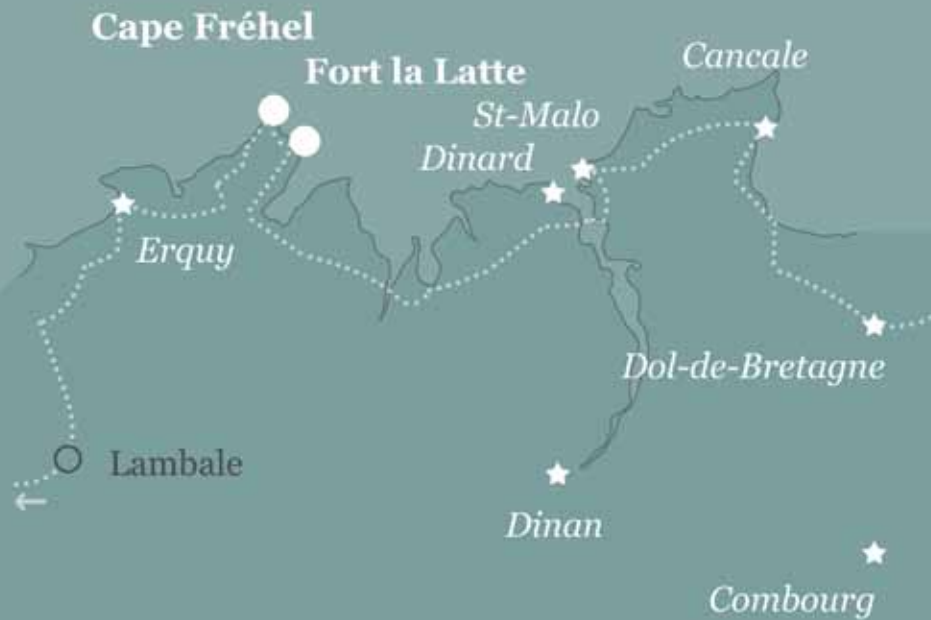
Sometimes the feeling of discovering a place for the first time depends only on the angle from which you approach it. We have seen Mont-Saint-Michel dozens of times, but never from the right bank of the Couesnon.

It is 6:30 pm. We have just arrived at the Grouin du Sud, south of Saint-Léonard. The characteristic pyramidal shape of the mountain is well distinguishable. On its top, the sword of the archangel Saint-Michel seems to pierce the celestial vault. Seen from this angle, the monument is just as impressive: its salt meadows are no longer in front, but behind, freeing the horizon of their vast green expanses. The place is superb. We decide to stop there for the night.

As we go to the end of the rocky point, the exceptional panorama changes according to the tide. Soon, a large tongue of sand emerges from the water. Against the light, it appears as dark and

mysterious as the side of a ghost ship that has been stranded for centuries. Little by little, the sun declines, the light takes on a thick orange energy making the scene almost surreal. In the distance, a flock of seagulls watches over the heights of the islet, circling in unison above the famous golden statue. The ocean is peaceful, smooth as a glass surface, accurately reflecting the shades of a glowing sky. In a final descent, the sun plunges into the ocean, carrying its most beautiful robes. The ocean darkens. This sweet vision resonates within us: it too seems to be extinguished, tired of the incessant movement. After all, don't we say that the ocean is the mirror of the soul?

Four months on the road. Four months of incessant movement and wandering. But these last few days, a tiredness has set in. Are we approaching the end of this adventure? Or is it a deeper desire for stability? The next few days will tell us.



The Emerald Coast

From Dol-de-Bretagne to Lamballe

100 km



View on Fresnaie Bay, Matignon: 48.6241, -2.2973



"Camping du Cap Fréhel", Fréhel



"Les galettes de sarrasin" (black wheat pancake)

CAPE FRÉHEL

Cape Fréhel is one of the most beautiful natural sites in Brittany. It is a bird sanctuary, and its cliffs are more than 70 meters high. This exceptional place is often taken by storm by visitors, but we had the chance to discover it in all intimacy. Cape Fréhel with its 600 hectares of heather and gorse moors offers a multitude of shimmering colors all summer long. In autumn, like the leaves of the trees, the flora gradually takes on bright ochre hues. In the evening, the golden rays of the sun give the flowerbeds an even more flamboyant color.



FORT LA LATTE

The imposing castle of La Roche Goyon and its coastal defense fort, Fort La Latte, overlook the sea magnificently. It is one of the largest Breton castles overlooking Saint-Malo Bay. Take the GR34 trail that runs along the torn coast: it offers exceptional views of Cape Fréhel and Fort La Latte.





The Coast of Legends

From Landivisiau to Landerneau

106 km



Beach parking lot, St-Cava, Plouguerneau: 48.616699, -4.56455



"Le kouign amann"



"Day by day": Halles Saint-Louis, Brest



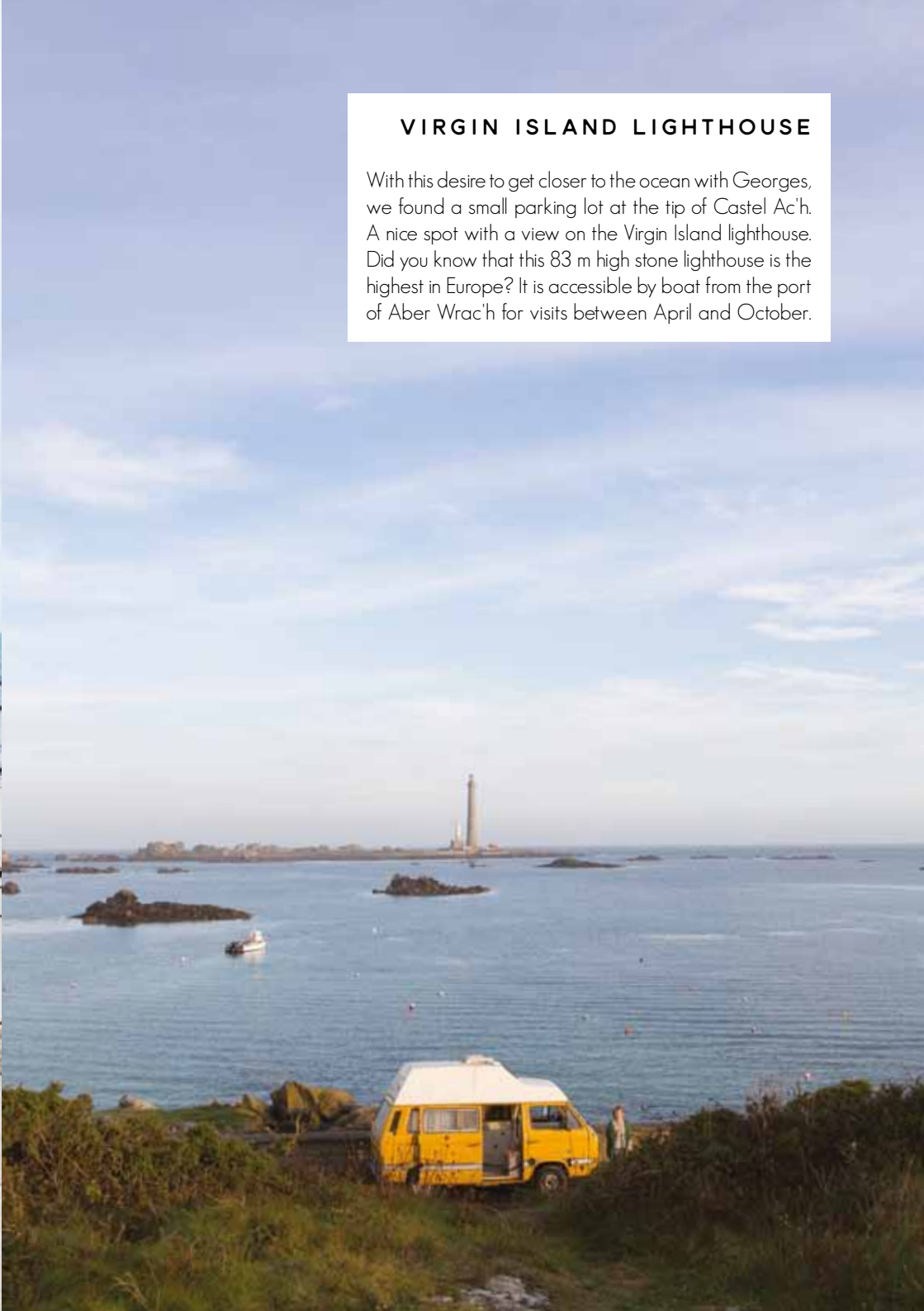
ABER WRAC'H

In the north of Finistère, in this region sometimes called the Breton fjords, there are three characteristic ancient river valleys: Aber Ildut, Aber Benoît and Aber Wrac'h. It is this last one (the biggest of the three) that we chose. It crosses the Breton countryside over more than twelve kilometers and travels across eleven communes. A stop at the viewpoint on Aber Wrac'h is a must (lat. 48.593092, long. -4.520144). A coastal path is also accessible below if you feel like it.



VIRGIN ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE

With this desire to get closer to the ocean with Georges, we found a small parking lot at the tip of Castel Ac'h. A nice spot with a view on the Virgin Island lighthouse. Did you know that this 83 m high stone lighthouse is the highest in Europe? It is accessible by boat from the port of Aber Wrac'h for visits between April and October.





MENEHAM

Nestled in the heart of the Coast of Legends, in Kerlouan, this hamlet of restored thatched cottages immediately appealed to us. Discover the old guard house embedded in the rocks, the inn that offers local specialties and the old customs barracks that now house craftsmen's workshops.



PONTUSVAL LIGHTHOUSE

There is a beautiful walk from the Hotel de la Mer to the Pontusval lighthouse. Here, the chaotic landscape of the rocks with curious shapes mixes with the fantastic stories that are told about the Pagan country. The Coast of Legends never ceases to feed the imagination of young and old.





The Mounts of Arrée

From Landerneau to Huelgoat

112 km



Saint-Michel de Brasparts Chapel: 48.347401, -3.94052



"Le kig ar farz"



The Mounts of Arrée summits

BRENNILIS

Since we had left Isère, we were impatient to drive Georges to the Mounts of Arrée, these Breton mountains with their modest 385m high peak. In the heart of the Armorique regional natural park, this territory is a real favorite. The landscapes of wild peat bogs in which the rocky crests are lost, Lake Brennilis and the chapel perched on Mount Saint-Michel-de-Brasparts give to the scenery a singular charm.



HUELGOAT FOREST

Also mentioned in our itinerary of myths and legends of Brittany, Huelgoat Forest is part of these magic places of interior Brittany. This chaos of enormous granite stones arouses astonishment and plays with our imagination. Do not miss the trembling rock and the Devil's Cave during your excursion!



THE MOUNTS OF ARRÉE

Camille's

FAVORITE MOMENT



Since we left the Chartreuse, I have only one desire: to discover these famous Breton mountains of the Armorican range, which are called the Mounts of Arrée.

We arrived in Brittany from Mont-Saint-Michel about ten days ago. Being originally from Ille-et-Vilaine and Pierre from the Côtes-d'Armor, we know this region better than all the others we have visited since the beginning of our adventure. Nevertheless, we wanted to finish our tour of France by revisiting all the places we love in Brittany: the Emerald Coast, the Pink Granite Coast, the Abers country, Morbihan Gulf.

The rocky barrier appears on the horizon, already announcing nice walks. We race, with an impatient heart, on this road that stretches to the Roc'h Ruz pass. Here we are! Are we still in Brittany? We can hardly believe it. Heavy scattered rocks, jagged ridges, heather, gorse, and shrubs are all together to draw this arid picture so characteristic of the Atlantic moors. In autumn, the whole setting is adorned

with golden tones that suddenly remind me of the Quebec plateaus of Mount Albert in the Indian summer. Georges blends in beautifully with the tall grass.

A point at the top of Mount Saint-Michel-de-Brasparts attracts our attention. That is all it takes to convince us to take a look. Located at 381m of altitude, a chapel built in 1672 dominates the landscape. In the distance, we can even see the Black Mountains and Morlaix Bay.

And to think that for a few years now I have moved away from my native Brittany because of my thirst for relief and wildness. I have come to think that I may have underestimated the raw nature that my region has to offer.

Perhaps we sometimes look too far for a change of scenery that is in fact almost before our eyes?





Morbihan Gulf

From Quiberon to Jans

133 km



Near the wild coast, Quiberon: 47.496976, -3.146882

Isolated corner facing the sea, St-Armel: 47.552474, -2733541



"La crème de Salidou au beurre sale"



BERDER ISLAND

Morbihan Gulf is a real inland sea sheltered from the ocean. Whether on foot, by boat or by bike, it is good to discover the smallest corners of this bay at a slower pace. Berder Island is by far our favorite. A private island, nevertheless, accessible to visitors, a 2.6 km walking path goes around it. With its fine sandy beaches, its view on Île-aux-Moines, its small chapel dating back to 1885, Berder is full of surprises.



QUIBERON

With its false airs of the edge of the world, the Pointe de Quiberon is a wild destination a few steps away from Morbihan Gulf. We took out our surfboards and our hiking shoes (but not at the same time), to enjoy this grandiose environment between land and sea. Do you want to escape to an island territory? Take a ferry from Quiberon to Belle-Île-en-Mer.



THE MYTHS & LEGENDS ROUTE — 436 km —

As we know, Brittany is a land of myths and legends, whose forests are inhabited by mysterious characters. Being both Bretons of origin, we grew up with the stories of Merlin, Lady Vivian, and King Arthur. This gave us the idea to concoct this thematic tour from Ille-et-Vilaine to Morbihan through Finistère.

La Roche aux Fées

To begin this enchanted exploration, we suggest a first stop south of Rennes. La Roche-aux-Fées is a megalithic covered walkway dating from the Neolithic period. It is said that Lady Vivian, helped by her constructors, would have raised this construction in one night only in order to convince the humans of the fairies' existence.

Huelgoat Forest

In this forest, we find some Arthurian legends and especially that of Gargantua. One day, furious with the welcome he was given, Gargantua decided to take his revenge by throwing all the rocks he found on his way, thus creating quite a mess. It is no coincidence that the forest is now called "the forest of chaos".

Brocéliande Forest

This second stop takes you closer to the Arthurian legends. The tomb of Merlin, the magic fountain of Barenton, the Valley of No Return, Morgana's domain, the Fairy's Mirror Pond, the Golden Tree... so many exceptional natural sites and fabulous tales that will amaze you. Without forgetting that Brocéliande is also a high place of druidism.

If you stop at the village of Paimpont, you will discover many small fairy stores and even an herbalist's shop for modern witches.

Locronan

At the end of the Douarnenez Bay, this small town of character takes us back in time thanks to its remarkably well-preserved architectural heritage. A dream setting in which we can let our imagination blossom and reinvent a life at the beginning of the 20th century.

The megaliths of Morbihan

Morbihan has an incredible megalithic heritage. There are no less than 550 megalithic sites! Our favorites are the alignments of Carnac and the Cairn of Gavrinis. Several theories wonder about these mysterious alignments: could they be landmarks to study the phases of the moon or could they be the homes of korrigans?







SEARCHING FOR ...

...OUR TREE

"Every human is torn between two needs. The need for the Pirogue, that is to say the journey, the uprooting from oneself, and the need for the Tree, that is to say the rooting, the identity.

Humans constantly wander between these two needs, sometimes giving in to one, sometimes to the other, until the day they understand that it is with the Tree that the Pirogue is made."

Melanesian myth

For more than ten years, we have traveled, lived, worked and volunteered abroad, carried by our desire to discover the world. Driven by our need for a Pirogue. These last four years have given us the opportunity to work while traveling. Without ties. Free.

But after a few months of immersion, we always end up longing for our French routine, our loved ones, culture, and landmarks. In short, longing for our roots. It is the need for the Tree that expresses itself.

We had known this Melanesian proverb

for a long time, without fully understanding the implication of its last sentence. At the end of these five months of road trip in France, we can not say that we are now fully able to understand it, but the nature of our understanding has changed.

We no longer grasp its meaning with our brains, but we feel it in every fiber of our body.

This adventure made us realize that to find a balance, it is not enough to improvise yourself as digital nomads and to live on the road with your van. If the Pirogue is not built with the wood of the Tree, it will end up getting flooded.

We LOVE to live in a van and travel, that is a fact. But today we feel the need to slow down the pace. The movement induces fatigue, and it is time to listen to it. To dismantle our Pirogue, and to rebuild it board by board with the right wood.

As these lines are written, we are renting an apartment in Mont-Dore, in the Puy-de-Dôme, while waiting to find our real home. We are dreaming of a small barn to renovate, overlooking nature and a well-stocked vegetable garden. Professionally, it is also time to take stock: from now on, we will start from our passions, rather than our skills.

Our trips are now limited to weekends of micro van life on board of Rosalie, our converted Kangoo Maxi.

The road has not finished calling us, shouting at us how much freedom is our most precious right.



But this time, we do not think about our next travel, neither our next road trip.



We are looking for our roots, we are looking for the strongest tree.



VANLIFE

TIPS

WHERE TO SLEEP WITH YOUR VAN?

About the law in France:

- There is no law prohibiting to sleep in your vehicle as long as your parked vehicle is not disturbing traffic and wild camping is not regulated.
- In theory, we cannot speak of wild camping when a vehicle is only parked for less than 24 hours without any external installation (for example: chairs, tables, coolers, heating source, parking wedges, raised roof, etc.), but only bivouac. In practice, however, that interpretation is done on a case-by-case basis and at the discretion of the agent.
- Advice when there are no signs: be discreet and clean, avoid using exterior installations and staying more than one night in the same spot.

Where to sleep?

- Campsite
- Farm campsite (see apps)
- Wild bivouac site
- Parking lot of a trail
- Public parking lot
- Church parking lot

Where not to sleep?

- Highway rest areas (for security)
- Natural protected area
- When local regulations prohibit it
- When a sign prohibits it
- Shores & seaside
- Near historical monuments

Our advise on the matter:

With the increasing closure of wild camping sites, and since the release of this book, some of the listed places might have closed. We advise you to be extra careful while choosing your sleeping spot and favor overnight stays in municipal campsite.

MOBILE APPS

- **Flush & Où sont les toilettes:** Find toilets near you
- **FreeTaps:** Find clean water sources near you
- **Park4night:** Find a spot for the night
- **Roadtrippers:** Plan your road trip and do not miss anything
- **Bienvenue à la ferme & Camping:** Camping in a farm
- **Waze:** GPS and road info
- **Google Maps:** To anticipate the slope if the engine your not very powerful
- **Essence&Co:** Cheapest Gas Station near you
- **Splitwise & Tricount:** Share fees between multiple people
- **Appli Marchés:** Farmer's markets in France
- **Visiorando:** IGN hikes map

KITCHEN & TOILETRIES

- ☐ First-aid kit
- ☐ Toiletries
- ☐ Baby wipes
- ☐ Laundry bag
- ☐ Trash bags
- ☐ Basin
- ☐ Solar shower
- ☐ Kitchen utensils
- ☐ BBQ grid
- ☐ Foldable chairs and table
- ☐ Thermos
- ☐ Boxes (for pasta, rice, sugar...)

CLOTHES

- ☐ 1 par of hiking shoes
- ☐ 1 pair of flip flops
- ☐ 1 pair of seasonal shoes
- ☐ 7 pairs of underwear
- ☐ 7 pairs of socks
- ☐ 7 seasonal t-shirts
- ☐ 2 pairs of pants or shorts
- ☐ 1 cardigan & 1 sweater
- ☐ 2 dresses or skirts
- ☐ 1 swimsuit
- ☐ 1 vest
- ☐ Hat & glasses

CAMPING

- ☐ Duvet and ground rug
- ☐ Tent
- ☐ Bug spray
- ☐ LED lamp

ZERO WASTE

- ☐ Metal straws
- ☐ Reusable cups
- ☐ Tupperwares
- ☐ Reusable bottle
- ☐ Fabric cotton pads
- ☐ Bamboo toothbrush
- ☐ Solid shampoos and soaps
- ☐ Bath gloves and towels
- ☐ Rags
- ☐ Washable hygienic protection
- ☐ Fabric napkins

MAINTENANCE

- ☐ Motor oil
- ☐ Cooling liquid
- ☐ Emergency triangle, yellow vest
- ☐ A few tools

USEFUL

- ☐ Lighter
- ☐ Flash light
- ☐ Power extension cord
- ☐ Garden hose
- ☐ Mosquito net
- ☐ Adapter for the cigarette lighter
- ☐ Converter from 12 Volts to 220 Volts
- ☐ Car phone holder
- ☐ Permits, passports, gray card ...
- ☐ Toilet paper rolls
- ☐ A small shovel

THE ESSENTIALS

LES VOYAGES DE TAO

Team | Magali, Julien & Tao
Website | lesvoyagesdetao.fr
Instagram | [@lesvoyagesdetao](https://www.instagram.com/lesvoyagesdetao)
Vehicle | Fiat Ducato
Bought | 31 000 € second-hand

INTERVIEW

Could you introduce yourself in a few words?

Magali the photographer and yoga enthusiast mom, Julien the surfer dad who loves board sports and Tao the already seven-year-old great traveler and adventurer. We have been traveling around France and Europe in our Fiat Ducato since 2017. Before, we had another travel companion, still a Fiat Ducato but much older.

Which van model did you choose for your nomadic travels?

The choice of vehicle was made quite quickly. Even if we were interested in small vans, we knew that they would not meet all our criteria. The camper, although attractive for its space, was quickly crossed off our list, because it was too imposing for our taste. So, we opted for a 6-meter-long Fiat Ducato, already converted. It was easier than converting it ourselves. We wanted a vehicle that remained compact while offering a certain comfort to our small family. We like to be independent, so a shower and toilet were essential for us. This vehicle is perfect for a family of three, we quickly found our marks. All the sports equipment goes on the roof, we reach it with a ladder. Tao sleeps in a cabin bed and we sleep on the permanent bed in the back.

In addition, having your own little house with you is very practical. With a child, it is often necessary to plan many things, especially when they are small. There is nothing easier than to put everything in the van and off you go.

What pleasures do you find in traveling in a van with your family?

Traveling in a truck gives Tao a real sense of freedom. We are closer to nature, and it becomes his favorite playground. We also like to be together in this small space, it strengthens our bond even more.

Would you have a van life spot to recommend near you?

We live in Nice on the French Riviera. There is no lack of possibilities to get away, even for a weekend. We love to cross the border and go to Italy. But one of our favorite spots is the Boréon. Sleeping on the riverside is just sublime. We disconnect immediately.



6 ADVANTAGES OF RVs

Often shunned by the younger generation, isn't the RV the ideal solution for family trips or long stays on the road? Marion from Wikicampers gives us her opinion on the matter!

1. COZINESS

One of the main benefit of a RV is above all the comfort and living space inside. It usually has a fixed bed in the back for two people and sometimes a bed above the cockpit or bunk beds.

2. CONFORT

The autonomy of a RV is several days: the solar panel recharges the battery even at a standstill and more than 100 liters of clean water reserve. As for the kitchen, the refrigerator is big enough to hold several days of food. You will be able to cook like at home (or almost). On the living room side, the table is big enough for at least four people to eat. The bathroom has a shower and toilet.

3. STORAGE SPACE

There is plenty of storage space, both inside and in the cargo area. Generally, RVs are equipped with bicycle racks. Very practical to move when you are parked.

4. PERFECT WHEN TRAVELING WITH CHILDREN

The RV is family-friendly, with up to six seatbelts and sleeping for seven. Your kids will love it and even get a nickname for it!

5. PARKING

One might think that it is difficult to find places to sleep when traveling in a RV, but there are many solutions to park at night: the France Passion network welcomes you for free at the homes of passionate farmers/winegrowers.

6. DRIVING

The RV is driven like a car, the B license is enough. You just have to take the curves wider and keep the height of the vehicle in mind.



Wikicampers.fr is a collaborative platform for renting small vans, large vans, and RVs between individuals. Reservations are made in a few clicks on the website, or the mobile app. Expect about 700 € for a week, including all-risk insurance and 24/7 assistance.

COUCOU LIBERTÉ

Team | Gilles & Maggy
Instagram | @coucouliberte
Vehicle | 1991 Mercedes 410D
Bought | 8 000 € second-hand
Expenses | 9 000 € for conversion



INTERVIEW

Could you introduce yourself in a few words?

We are Gilles and Maggy, accompanied by Minoutte, our cat. We travel full time, since June 2018, in our 1991 Mercedes 410D.

Which van model did you choose for your nomadic life?

We wanted a truck that was reliable and had a small footprint. We also thought about the GVWR and engine power constraints, to achieve a balance, hence the choice of this Mercedes.

Advantages: It has few electronics. The engine has enough torque even if the top speed remains limited compared to a modern van!

Disadvantages: It is noisy, the engine being in the cabin. So, we prefer short distances to rest our ears.

We converted the van ourselves: insulation, creation of the furniture, installation of the windows/lanterns. We only had the gas, water/heating and the basic electricity done, for safety reasons and also to go faster in the construction. The truck is full of DIY stuff, like our little spice rack and our storage nets. We bought the truck empty, 8000€, and after that it cost us about 17000€ in total.

Why did you decide to live in a van full time?

The desire to travel, to change our way of life. After more than 10 years in the Paris area, we were fed up with the eat-work-sleep routine. We had not traveled much, Maggy had to quit her job, Gilles was already a freelancer, so it was the perfect opportunity. We are lucky to have jobs that are perfect for the nomadic lifestyle. So, the transition was easy. The constraints of freelancing remain the same, van life and professional life are just a question of balance.

Would you have a van life spot to recommend near you?

The van is our home, so we do not live in any particular area. We loved Lake Salagou and Provence's Colorado, which have supernatural colors. There is also Jura! We did it during the fall. The colors are superb. To sleep in a nature spot in the middle of the fir trees, it is amazing.



PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SHOWER IN A VAN

One of the questions that most people ask themselves before their first adventure in a van is: how to take a shower and keep the same hygiene as at home (or almost!) when you are on the road?

Jean-Philippe from the rental agency VAN-AWAY gives us his best advice.

THE SHOWER CABIN

If a cat's toilet can be done inside the van, a real shower will require, if it is taken around the vehicle, adapted equipment. Unless you want to dazzle your entourage with your anatomy...

- ◆ The shower tent (the Decathlon model is very good), which can be set up in two seconds (proven!) but folds up in at least two minutes. Advantage: it takes up little space when folded and can be set up almost anywhere.
- ◆ The tailgate tent - and this is our preference - can be fixed in one minute to the back of the van and offers more space and comfort. The models from Reimo are very good value for money, and the Volkswagen tent is of course expensive, but very good (but expensive).
- ◆ Add to that the inevitable little rubber mat to avoid showering in a pool of mud.

A HOT SHOWER?

Let us get to the point: how do you take a hot shower around your van?

- ◆ The solar shower: It is a PVC bag connected to a hose with a shower head-shaped nozzle, which hangs high in the sun. A simple and not very cumbersome way to take a shower on a road trip, only in the summer season!

- ◆ The portable pressure shower: More practical than the solar shower, it is equipped with a system to put the water under pressure. To heat the water, two solutions: the sun as before, or faster, a mixture of cold water and simmering water heated in a pan.
- ◆ And the best of all: hot water directly from the showerhead of your van! If several solutions exist (gas, solar...), the most practical and the least cumbersome is the installation of a boiler which allows to heat a small quantity of water to 60 or 80 degrees. A mixer installed on your back shower allows you to adjust the temperature... just like at home!

This solution is installed in the Van-Away network since 2020 on our rental vans and can be installed on demand on your own van: you are then totally autonomous. And you have no more excuses to bivouac instead of going to the campsite, like our kitesurfing champion Armelle Courtois, here.



Van-Away, with 15 agencies in France and one in New Caledonia, has been a specialist in itinerant vacations and nomadic stays for couples, friends or families for almost 10 years. Their mission: to make you discover freedom on board of a van, a converted van to be in total autonomy, or to live a 100% natural road trip in your own car equipped with a mini caravan or a roof tent to be even closer to the stars.

AKAO VAN

Team | Myriam & Florian
Instagram | @akao.van / @gruet.florian
Portfolio | www.gruetflorian.com
Vehicle | 1993 Citroën Hymer B564
Bought | 10 000 € second-hand
Expenses | 300 € for conversion



INTERVIEW

Could you introduce yourself in a few words?

Hi, I am Myriam, 37 years old, creative, jack-of-all-trades and plant lover, and this is Florian, 41 years old, photographer specialized in outdoor activities, happy owner of Bobby, our 1993 Citroën Hymer. We travel according to our desires on the French roads in search of new landscapes and beautiful atmospheres to capture.

Which van model did you choose for your nomadic life?

Having a budget of 10000€ following the sale of our first vehicle (a Trafic II L1H1 converted by us), we were looking for a truck with all the "basic" conveniences on board: kitchen, toilets, shower, and heating to leave longer on the roads at any season, while being more autonomous. Ideally, we wanted a comfortable vehicle, not too big, easy to handle and with a nice look for the pictures! The idea of a camper emerged, and all our criteria were met in the Hymer B564.

Bobby has now been part of our daily life for a year and a half. In good condition, we just renovated it by adjusting the center table to suit our creative needs, replacing the old interior lighting system with LEDs (more economical), and changing the fabrics of the seats and benches, that is all!

Why did you decide to live in a van full time?

After leaving our respective jobs (in 2016 and 2017) to go 100% into photography, we felt the need to get away. So, we bought our first van, the Trafic. Living in a van full time was not at all planned at that time, but the three months spent non-stop in our first little house on wheels, crossing France and driving along the west coast, from Biarritz to Mont-Saint-Michel, confirmed our need for adventure.

Six months later, we left our apartment in the South of France, bought our current truck, and took the road of nomadic life. The freedom to move when we want, where we want and stay as long as we want, totally suits this life of outdoor photographers we have chosen.

Being from the Mediterranean region, we have always had our feet in the water. And as photographers specialized in underwater photography, it was important for us to be able to continue our nautical activities while being on the road.



VAN LIFE AND WATER SPORTS

Myriam & Florian give us their four tips for combining water activities, such as snorkeling, paddling, or kayaking, with life in a van.

1

EQUIPMENT

Opt for inflatable equipment (paddle and kayak), more practical to store in the truck. Especially when you do not have an external trunk or roof racks.

2

RINSING

Rinse the wetsuits thoroughly in the beach showers or directly in the truck's shower.

3

DRYING

Find a place to put the soaked equipment: we lay down our wetsuits and store the rest (waterproof box, masks, and fins) in the shower tray which is separated from the toilets. Besides, it is one of our main criteria during the choice of vehicle.

4

SHOWER

When we find an external water point, we also use a nomadic shower of eight liters, very practical to leave the sand outside the truck.



CHOOSING A SMALL VAN OR A LARGE CAMPER VAN?

Nathalie, from the information website FOURGON LE SITE, offers you a quiz to find out what type of vehicle would be best suited to your adventures on the French roads.

WHAT I PREFER... IS:

- ☐ **Going where I want**
Less than 200 m to squeeze under the height bars and pass in Class 1 at the tollbooth, a size adapted to urban parking... I want to go everywhere and be ultra-discrete.
- ☐ **A vehicle (also) for every day**
Compact and practical, I want to be able to use my vehicle every day to take the kids to school or to go shopping.
- ☐ **Having style**
Surfboard on the roof, campfire and guitar, the great VW Combi era still makes me dream. If I had been 30 years old in the 70's, I would have been one of them!
- ☐ **Focusing on the essential**
What I need above all is a vehicle to move around and a shelter to sleep in. For the kitchen or the shower, life hacks are my motto. I get by on opportunities.



I need a small van! I prefer something like a Ford Transit Custom, a VW T6, a Renault Trafic...

WHAT I LIKE... IS:

- ☐ **Bringing everything I need**
Hiking shoes, outdoor furniture, sports equipment... nothing will be left behind. I need plenty of storage space and a substantial payload.
- ☐ **Traveling as a family**
With four people, each person must have a minimum of living space on board and a comfortable bed, a permanent one if possible, to simplify daily life.
- ☐ **Taking a good shower**
I want to be able to wash daily and in privacy. For the shower, I need a reserve of a hundred liters of clean water for three or four days of autonomy.
- ☐ **Cooking real meals**
Picnics are nice, but I also like good food. With a large fridge and a real work surface, I can cook (almost) like at home.



I need a large camper van! I prefer something like a Fiat Ducato, a Citroën Jumper, a Mercedes Sprinter...



fourgonlesite
L'ACTUALITÉ DU VAN & DU FOURGON AMÉNAGÉ

Fourgonlesite.com is the first information website dedicated to van news: vehicle tests, buying guides, van life tips (testimonials, road-trip ideas...). The Fourgonlesite team is also the organizer of the Camper Van Week-End, a 100% van event: exhibition of vehicles, meetings between van lifers, sharing and conviviality guaranteed!

YOGA VANLIFE

Team	I	Pauline
Instagram	I	@yogavanlife / @wildbyearth
Website	I	www.poleenyoga.com
Vehicle	I	2005 Renault Master L1H1
Bought	I	2 500 € second-hand
Expenses	I	2 500 € for conversion

INTERVIEW

Could you introduce yourself in a few words?

Je suis Pauline, une nomade de 28 ans. Avec mon lapin nommé Õnskan, nous vivons dans Loghann (nom signifiant petite caverne en Celte) mon van aménagé : un Renault Master L1H1 de 2005. Professeure de Yoga Intuitif et créatrice d'objets de décorations, j'allie travail et voyages depuis mars 2018.

Which van model did you choose for your nomadic life?

L'allure discrète et passe-partout d'un utilitaire m'a séduite. Même si le confort et l'espace intérieur de Loghann restent restreints (on ne s'y tient pas debout), son petit gabarit me permet de me garer partout et d'accéder à des spots en pleine nature facilement. Il m'a fallu quatre mois pour l'aménager seule. À part la partie électricité qui était moins réjouissante, j'ai adoré bricoler et apprendre à créer ma propre maison sur roues ! Son prix total m'a coûté environ 5000€, dont la moitié pour l'aménagement.

Living in a van: a new start for you?

It was after six years of living in London that I felt the need to slow down, to take the time to explore the outside world and my inner world. I left everything behind to live a different kind of life full time in a van and continue to share my love of yoga on the road. I teach

people I meet on my travels and at yoga festivals and studios all over Europe. Having more free time has allowed me to enrich my creativity. I started a second professional activity, always done with passion, creating decorative objects in wood and macramé. To be compatible with my nomadism, I chose to sell them online, on my Etsy store Wild by Earth. This way of life also offers me more independence, autonomy, and freedom! I feel in phase with my values of living more with less, and I truly recharge my batteries in contact with nature.

Is it easy for a woman to travel alone in a van?

Is traveling alone in a van different for a woman than for a man? Yes. Is it more dangerous than a sedentary life? No. We still face the same issues in a patriarchal society, no matter what our lifestyle is. It is the desire to defend this nuance, and to contribute to change the perception of the image of free and independent women, that encouraged me to co-create, with other women living alone in a van, @vanlifeuses: a collective whose mission is to claim the right to freedom for women.



YOGA AND VANLIFE

Here are five tips from Pauline to keep a yoga routine while on a road trip.

1

EQUIPMENT

Have a thick yoga mat so you can practice outdoors on any surface.

2

FLEXIBILITY

Be flexible, not physically, but in terms of the time and regularity of your practice, which must adapt to the ever-changing conditions of van life.

3

CONCENTRATION

Create a mental bubble to ignore the curious looks from passers-by.

4

CREATIVITY

Be creative in practicing some movements and stretches while sitting on the bench or lying on the bed on rainy days.

5

ENVIRONMENT

Take advantage of the beautiful spots isolated in nature for an even more magical session!





ROADTRIP



MAKES ME FREE

With the support of our two other partners,
Idylcar and Eco Campers:



Idylcar is a network of van and camper dealers and repairers. Our homogeneous geographical implantation brings us an important national presence. We distribute and maintain leisure vehicles of many brands, we offer accessories to equip, repair and convert vans and campers. To date, the Idylcar network is composed of about fifty dealers who are experts in leisure vehicles with more than 400 employees trained in the latest technologies.



In the beginning, the company Eco Campers was created with the will to share our passion, in a concern of conservation and safeguard of the VW Combi. Its activity consisted then of restoration and sale of second-hand vehicles. Then our services were extended to conversion, in particular following a partnership with REIMO. Since then, Eco Campers is the exclusive REIMO converter in France. All the vans that have passed through our hands have fueled the passion and hardened the experience of our team on all types of layouts.

Follow our new adventures!

www.theroadtrippers.fr



hello@theroadtrippers.fr



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A typo was left in our text? Send us a message :)

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